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City Life and Beyond in Times of Pandemic

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In late December 2019, the official news circulated that cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology were detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan — the virus was later identified as a SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) and became widely known as Covid-19. People worldwide were told not to be alarmed. The World Health Organisation (WHO) did not recommend specific measures for travellers and advised against the application of travel and trade restrictions on China (WHO 2020). Only in late January, as deaths surged, the Chinese authorities advised against travelling to Wuhan (BBC 2020).[1] Concomitant with this news and media reports that the new virus outbreak was reaching global proportion, on 30 January 2020 the WHO declared a state of public health emergency. Another month and a half would pass before the WHO declared the outbreak a pandemic on 11 March.

Amid rumours of initial cover-ups, some national governments adopted a mild approach, and began to implement measures to contain contagion only after the 'sudden' surge of infections and the piling up of coffins in their country; others put their hopes in the so-called 'herd immunity'.[2] Some cited selected evidence from past flu pandemics.[3] More generally, decision-makers preferred to ignore lessons from history, seemingly oblivious that today's world is more interconnected and interdependent than ever; it runs fast but viruses run even faster. Contradictory statements followed: the *ad hoc* justification was that this was a new virus about which there was little scientific knowledge. However, research soon confirmed that Covid-19 was a mutated, and more virulent, strand of the coronavirus that caused the 2002-2004 SARS-CoV-1 epidemic (Shi et al. 2020) which had been relatively contained.[4] Significantly, the SARS-CoV-1 outbreak had prompted a new approach to the management of epidemics, leading to worldwide cooperation among virologists and epidemiologists under the aegis of WHO to explain why this atypical pneumonia, which

[1] As it has gradually emerged, the Chinese authorities had failed to report the start of the epidemic and, in December 2019, 'silenced' Dr Li Wenliang and other whistle-blowing doctors (Keck 2020). In early January 2020, staff at the Wuhan laboratory were ordered not to disclose information on the disease (Birrell 2020), including the results of the new virus gene sequencing (Shi et al. 2020).

[2] Only South Korea and Japans acted immediately.

[3] For example, the three flu pandemics of the twentieth century: the Spanish influenza (1918-20), the Asian flu (1957-58) and the Hong Kong flu (1968-70). Allegations of conflict of interests in mounting a 'campaign of panic' to sell vaccines led to controversies on whether the Swine flu of 2009-2010 should be considered a pandemic, too (Godlee 2010). Virologists, however, do not classify Covid-19 as an influenza virus (Shi et al. 2020).

[4] SARS-CoV-1 epidemic lasted about 8 months, causing between 8,096 and 8,107 cases, 774 to 811 deaths in 26-33 countries; the cited ranges are due to the fact that different sources, including the WHO, provide different 'probable' cases. Of these, 5,327 cases and 349 deaths were registered in mainland China (WHO 2004).

generally causes mild illness, had become so lethal (Abraham 2007). Undoubtedly, scientific discoveries may be refuted by subsequent evidence. However, one wonders what findings the 16 years of research had yielded and how they had been used.[5] Interestingly, in 2018, the WHO adopted the term 'Disease X' to indicate unknown pathogens that could cause future pandemics. In February 2020, several virologists speculated whether Covid-19 was 'the first' Disease X (Jiang and Shi 2020, Daszak 2020).

Amid global incertitude and guesswork, one certainty seemed to be shared by governments across the globe; that the new virus was hitting the poor and the rich indiscriminately — which, as real life showed, was partially true and perhaps only on a strictly 'biological' level.

In an open letter that I published in March 2020 (Prato 2020a) I reflected briefly on how the apparently 'egalitarian' virus and the attendant emergency policies were affecting different sections of the population. For a while, I had been meditating on the impact of the stay-at-home policy on people's life — depending on their job, or lack of it, their income, their housing situation, and so on. As observed in the Introduction to *Urban Inequalities* (Pardo and Prato 2020), the pandemic has not only brought out how disparities render some people more vulnerable than others, but has also both exacerbated existing inequalities and generated new injustice.

The letter started as a simple message to inform the readers of the CUA Bulletin[6] that the planned events might be rescheduled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the end of March, Italo Pardo, convenor of the second IUS Workshop on Legitimacy[7] had consulted with the participants on whether we should wait and see how the situation unfolded or postpone the workshop to the following year. The topic of the 2020 IUS Workshop could not be timelier: '*Legitimacy – The Right to Health*'. However, given the continuously evolving situation, we all agreed to reschedule the event to 2021 (http://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2020-2/). Italo Pardo encouraged us to consider expanding our original ideas and include in our analysis pandemic-related questions relevant to our specific ethnographies.

In the following weeks, infection rates and casualties surged globally. Meanwhile, several colleagues had reacted to my 'open letter' sharing their experiences of the lockdown emergency in their countries. Stimulated by these reactions, I resolved to edit this Special Issue on 'City Life in the Time of Pandemic'. The colleagues with whom I had corresponded joined the project and suggested that I should circulate an open Call, including my letter.

In order to contextualize this special issue, it is worth reproducing the letter that triggered the Call. It read:

> 'These are trying and worrisome times for everybody. Covid-19 is creating uncertainty for all across the world. Undeniably, however, some people are affected more profoundly than others.

[5] Dr Shi — who is considered a world's leading expert on coronavirus — had warned of the possibility of a new SARS-like outbreak 11 months before the Covid-19 epidemic erupted in Wuhan.
[6] Commission on Urban Anthropology: https://www.facebook.com/commissionurbananthropology.
[7] IUS-International Urban Symposium: http://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/.

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> In a recent correspondence with some colleagues we reflected on how very fortunate academics are; as one of my colleagues noted, academics are, after all, "extremely privileged". Not only can they continue to work remotely; most of them enjoy a stable job and regular income; others, though on part-time or temporary contracts, can also enjoy a degree of security (at least in the immediate future). I know that not everybody in the academic community sees it that way. Alas, complainers can be found everywhere, even when there is no real need to complain, especially in such exceptional times.
>
> There are those who complain that working from home is stressful; or that some emergency measures restrict their freedom; or that it has become difficult to buy flour and baking powder. All these complaints and other self-victimising attitudes not only show the vacuity of some problems; they also hide the tragic reality that the stay-at-home policy is not the same for everybody; its effects on people's mental and physical wellbeing vary greatly depending, just to mention a few factors, on the square metres of one's house, on having access to private open-air spaces (e.g., a terrace, a balcony or a garden), on having access to a PC and unlimited internet for the children's home schooling and the household entertainment, on being able to have the fridge and larder well stocked. The list could go on.
>
> So, let's pause for a moment and ponder to what extent Covid-19 and the attendant consequences are hitting humankind "indiscriminately".
>
> Let's think of those who are losing their livelihood and the homeless. Let's spare a thought for the "essential" workers, who have to venture out to make sure that our necessities are satisfied and our life is safe, and for the volunteers who are selflessly helping people and their community. Above all, let's direct our thoughts towards the Health Service personnel around the world who daily and tirelessly are risking their lives. I salute them: They are the true heroes of our time.
>
> Take care and, however stressful this exceptional time can be, stay as much as possible on-course. Most important, as human beings, do support in practical ways your local community and, when you can, volunteer your help.'

I was of course aware that not all people cope well under stress and some might feel overwhelmed and helpless under 'special' circumstances. At the same time, I hoped that those more fortunate would step out of their cocooned life, dispense with self-victimisation and, especially, show solidarity.

Over the following months, profound changes in every aspect of social and public life were enforced across the world. I found initially annoying people's complaints about some containment measures: stay at home, avoid mass gatherings and partying, along with prophylactic guidelines similar to those adopted in 1918.

Over time, however, more restrictive policies were enforced that were blatantly inimical to civil liberties. Governments across the globe — whatever their 'colour' — began to bring in extreme 'emergency' powers and, while democratic parliamentary sessions were suspended, got into the habit of ruling by decree. Unsurprisingly, their autocratic and secretive ruling has weakened people's trust and raised questions on the legitimacy of their actions (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2018).

Some people acquiesced with their government's impositions, accepting uncritically every single word uttered by their rulers. Many others received with growing scepticism the often contradictory 'scientific truths' provided by the experts. Rulers' actions have been marred by ambiguous guidelines, statistical comparisons between countries often based on incomparable variables or imprecise data.[8] Above all, people were outraged by reported evidence of double standards in the application of the emergency measures — what was imposed to the wider population was blatantly disregarded by members of some privileged groups, who cunningly circumvented rules using loopholes to excuse their actions.[9] Other infringements were opportunistically overlooked and went unpunished. Increasingly, the question was asked, Was the pandemic being used once again as a means of social control?

Between Solidarity and a Brutus Approach

The 2020 pandemic emergency has brought out a shared sense of civic responsibility, which manifested in several forms of solidarity. I am most familiar with the British and Italian situations. In the UK, thousands of people volunteered to help local authorities in delivering food and services to the elderly and vulnerable who were advised to 'shield'. Others, joined Charities in on-line fund-raising activities and helped them to deliver their services. Empty hotels accommodated the homeless. In Italy, neighbourhoods engaged in self-organized mutual aid. In a town in the province of Brindisi (where I did fieldwork) a university student involved local shopkeepers into raising money for impoverished families. In some areas of central Naples, people lined their *vicoli* (narrow streets) with boxes of food and other necessities for destitute households, or left filled baskets (traditionally used to shop from passing street vendors) permanently hanging from their balconies with a note that read: 'If you have, give. If you don't have, please take'. Still others expanded the practice of '*spesa sospesa*' (literally 'suspended shopping') usually applied on the occasion of festivities like Christmas and based on the same principle of the daily practices of 'suspended coffee' or

[8] Statistics' unreliability is not new. Not surprisingly, official reports on previous pandemics give figures on both confirmed cases and suspected cases; confirmed deaths and estimated deaths; estimates of deaths directly caused by the virus and those that might have been caused by secondary complications, etc.

[9] Examples abound. In the UK, the cases of the PM's senior adviser Dominic Cummings, the Labour MP Rose Duffield and the government scientist Neil Ferguson are emblematic; all three broke lockdown rules but the news emerged only much later (James 2020, Pidd 2020, Mikhailova et al. 2020). In Italy, several politicians have been caught partying in private villas or holidaying on private boats without face covering and disregarding social distancing, while most Italians were facing hardship under strict rules (IlGallo 2020, Huffpost 2020).

'suspended bread'. When shopping, customers pay for an extra coffee or food, so that those who cannot afford to pay, can have for free what they need. Internationally, people (including anthropologists) have donated money to help build new hospitals, or raised funds to buy much needed equipment.[10]

The intervention of several national governments in support of the slumping economy can be seen as a form of 'interested altruism', of the kind described by Attali in 2009. New fiscal policies have been implemented and public spending earmarked for wage subsidies, guaranteed loans for business, support for the self-employed and so on.[11] Across Europe, some governments have been more successful than others in fulfilling their promises. The most affected hoped to receive help from the EU, which after much pressure eventually responded with an ambiguous show of solidarity.

The new economic initiatives and other emergency measures have, however, sparked a Brutus-like approach in several fields. Similar to Brutus in the Shakespearian tragedy *Julius Caesar*, several people — in politics and elsewhere, individually or as lobbies and interest groups — have tried to use the 'pandemic emergency' to their advantage. Let me explain.

In urging his comrade Cassius to seize a fleeting opportunity in the conflict against Octavian and Antony, Brutus states:

> 'There is a tide in the affairs of men.
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune […]
> And we must take the current when it serves,
> Or lose our ventures.'
> (W. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3: 218-19, 223-24).

The above quote is often used by politicians to justify Machiavellian measures in trying to solve problematic situations, as if 'riding the tide' of opportunities would be a commendable action. Most often, however, it is applied in the attempt to reverse unfavourable circumstances and win potentially losing battles, or gain privileges to which they would not otherwise have access. Some of these grabbing attitudes have been low-key; others have made the headlines as outright unscrupulous and contemptible. Examples vary from businesses demanding to have access to job retention schemes (though they were not immediately in need of it) to employed individuals (including politicians) and jailed criminals claiming benefits and basic income, while unemployed people were denied help because they owned the house in which they lived (Cosenza 2020); or the request directed in April to the EU that 'unconditional basic income should be paid out for at least three months both to those who are currently employed and the unemployed, directly to their bank accounts', with the

[10] The case of the centenarian Captain Sir Thomas Moore in the UK has become exemplary. A retired army officer, he walked laps of his garden with the aim of raising £1,000 for 'NHS Charities Together'. In less than a month, he raised £32.79 million.

[11] The initiative of some UK vice-chancellors to take a six-month pay cut (from August) could be seen as a form of 'interested altruism'. However, in 2018-19, their salaries ranged between £350.00 and £410.000 a year. A campaign continues, asking that vice-chancellors' salaries should not be higher than that of the Prime Minister (whose standard salary is around £150.000).

justification that 'bureaucracy is the enemy of the vulnerable' and that there was no time for income verification (Markiewicz 2020).[12] One thinks of the new president of INPS,[13] the Italian National Institute for Social Security, doubling his salary in the face of millions of his fellow citizens' losing their jobs and getting empty promises of help (Barone 2020). Or, in view of forthcoming electoral ballots, local authorities spending 41.5 million Euros on the production of useless face masks to be distributed first to the health personnel and, then, to the local residents.[14] Some, have hijacked the 'climate change' agenda, arguing in favour of a continued lockdown as booster of environmental sustainability. Paradoxically, ongoing studies show that, while the reduction of carbon monoxide has been minimal, the plastic waste pollution generated by protective equipment, hand sanitiser bottles and more food packaging has become a serious concern (*Innovationnews* 2020).

Most worryingly, governments appear to be using the 'state of emergency' as a political strategy to establish new forms of control, while skirting their responsibilities. Of course, governments know that, as Dominique Strauss-Kahn points out (2020), they are to be blamed for their delay in responding to the epidemic and allowing their health systems to be overwhelmed. And yet, as early as April 2020, some have attempted to pass decrees that absolve them of civil, penal, administrative and financial responsibilities (Nava 2020). Moreover, since September, several governments have extended the state of emergency until Spring 2021. As I mentioned earlier, this illegitimate exercise of power may have been (more or less cleverly) disguised with experts' arguments and declarations on the protection of public health, but it has in fact established a new 'biosecurity' regime fuelled by fear.

The 'New Normal': Presage of a Dystopian Future?

Since the implementation of the 'state of emergency', there has been growing reference to a 'new normal'. The obvious question arises, 'if this is an emergency, why should humanity embrace the containment measures as a permanent "normal" way of life?'

Undeniably, technologies have helped people to work remotely. Among the benefits, one thinks of those new remote workers who have joined their families who resided elsewhere (sometimes, even abroad). Online teaching, webinars and remote conferencing have helped to avoid a total freeze of academic life and scientific events — though attendees say that they have missed the 'sparks' and stimuli from 'informal' socializing exchanges. ICT has allowed researchers to stay in contact with their field and people to stay in contact with friends and families, organise fund-raising events, skype parties, and so on. Obviously, in the immediate future ICT will be fundamental for the continuation of many activities. There is, nevertheless, a disquieting aspect of this apparently positive use of technology that needs attention.

[12] Signatories included intellectuals and politicians who enjoy fat salaries and lucrative 'extra' income from various sources.

[13] INPS (*Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale*) is under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

[14] In March 2020, a group of Tuscan doctors denounced the Region's Governor to the judicial authorities for attempted massacre (Tosi 2020).

Humans are social beings and their sociality includes in-person physical encounters; it is made of symbolic interactions and sensory experiences, which extend to the natural world. So, what does 'the new normal' mean? Is it perhaps not a coincidence that the recommended 'physical' distance to avoid contagion has been called 'social distancing'?

While mulling on these questions, the 1968 controversial sci-fi film *Barbarella* came to mind. Roger Vadim's film depicts a new futuristic morality. Barbarella — a representative of the 'United Earth' government — travels through space to find a scientist who, she is told, could destroy humanity. Barbarella symbolizes a future society where technology is everything and people have no emotions, individual personality or independent psychology; a future which is epitomized by Earth's new 'advanced' virtual practices in interpersonal relations, such as replacing physical intimacy with 'taking a pill'. In light of the biopolitical projects that are peddled today, the representation of that futuristic society does not seem so far-fetched.

In 2009, during the swine flu epidemic, the influential French technocrat Jacques Attali examined how a possible pandemic could be 'used' for 'laudable' (in his opinion) political purposes. In an article published in *L'Express* (2009) he wrote:

> 'History teaches us that humanity only evolves significantly when it is really afraid: it then first sets up defence mechanisms; sometimes intolerable (scapegoats and totalitarianisms); sometimes futile (distraction); sometimes effective (therapeutic strategies, setting aside all previous moral principles if necessary). Then, once the crisis is over, it transforms these mechanisms to make them compatible with individual freedom and include them in a democratic health policy. The beginning of the pandemic could trigger one of these structural fears.' (my translation).

Attali also warned that, once the structural fears are established, 'prevention and control mechanisms' should be put in place 'before the — inevitable — next [pandemic]'. He added:

> 'For that, we will have to put in place a global police force, global storage and therefore global taxation. Then, much faster than the sole economic reason would have allowed, we will be able to set up the bases of a true World Government.' (my translation).

Attali is not alone in considering pandemics as a useful instrument to 'solve' some of the world problems, including overpopulation. The 'benefits' of a 'necessary' depopulation have been described as 'shrink and prosper' (Weisman 2013).

In May 2009, a group of billionaires secretly met in Manhattan to discuss plans 'to curb the world overpopulation'. Why the secret? Because they did not want newspapers to paint them as an 'alternative world government', they argued. They agreed on a strategy that tackled population growth as a potentially disastrous environmental, social and industrial threat and economic burden (Frank 2009). They also trusted that new technologies would be key in such an endeavour.

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Since April 2020, politicians have encouraged expert analyses on the potential of smart technology to help people adapt to new ways of living in post Covid-19 cities. It is argued that technologies will facilitate business operations and make people more independent. Meanwhile, 'track/test and trace' technologies are ushered in to allow governments to harness data on people's life; this new form of surveillance is presented as the 'price worth paying' in the name of 'safety'.

To raise concern about these biopolitical projects (allegedly on behalf of 'the greater good') does not mean to question the role of science or medicine, or underestimate the risk of the virus; it is rather a matter of questioning how science and medicine are used.

The Italian philosopher Agamben has recently criticized the 'techno-medical despotism' of the Italian government, justified in the name of the 'common good', but in fact resulting in in the suppression of political and civic freedoms, of human rights and dignity (Agamben 2020). Internationally influential in the social sciences until recently, Agamben has lost the support of the Italian 'radical' intellectual establishment because of his position on Covid-19 and his criticism of the government. With punctual descriptions and denunciations, he describes the government's action as a 'gigantic operation to falsify the truth' and points out how Covid-19 pandemic has been exploited as an opportunity to bring in authoritarianism and a new political rationality centred around biosecurity.

Agamben refers to Zylberman's discussion (2013) of the process by which health security was becoming an essential part of international political strategies. Zylberman warned that the creation of a sort of 'health terror' could be used to strengthen citizens' maximum adherence to the institutions of government. Similarly, Agamben reflects on the Great Transformation underway in western bourgeoise democracies. He argues that, in the name of biosecurity and health, the democratic models of government with their parliaments and declarations of rights are everywhere giving way to a new despotism in which citizens are asked to accept unprecedented limitations to their hard-won freedoms. How long, he asks, will we be willing to live in a 'state of exception' that is continually extended?

City Life and Beyond in the Times of Pandemic

The Call for Contributions for this special issue was circulated towards the end April. It was a time when some countries were planning to ease their lockdown measures, while those who had been hit later were strengthening theirs. As I noted in the Call, it was clear by then that the impact of the pandemic — and of the related policies — would unfortunately stay with us for a long time. I suggested some ideas for reflection on the ongoing situation, but also as stimuli for future analysis. Suggested ideas included:

> Changes in the private daily life (new routines, home schooling); work & work disruptions (e.g., home/'smart' working, mix of 'smart' working and partial but compulsory use of annual holiday entitlement, workplace safety); unemployment and/or loss of income (permanent/temporary/partial, furloughing and other job retention schemes); the role of 'essential' workers; the impact on the work of medical and health service personnel; community support (spontaneous or

organized; volunteering, fundraising, donations); homelessness and 'emergency' shelters; housing situation (including condominiums and shared spaces, access to open-air spaces, gated-communities, slums); disruptions in access to medical care; physical and mental health; social and family relations; communication (old and new technologies, social media, formal and informal news); security, safety and monitoring (the increasing use of drones, policing; privacy and tracking apps on people's movement and health; uses and abuses of access to individual digital footprint); mobility, infrastructure and services (including 'virtual' services, shopping, leisure, transport, urban waste); changing use of the urban space (including built up and natural space; parks and other public spaces).

Of course, some topics would inevitably overlap. Also, contributors were encouraged to reflect on any other aspects or issues they had come across, or thought to be relevant but were not included in the suggested list. The initial title was later expanded to convey more immediately the fact that city life moves 'beyond' the strictly physical urban space. Not all the listed aspects are addressed in this special issue. Also, most regrettably, some initial proposals by professionals in the health sector and other relevant fields were withdrawn from publication for fear of retaliation in their work place, including the real danger of losing their jobs — which raises the new question, Besides health, to which other spheres of life will the state of fear expand?

In the 1950s, Hannah Arendt wrote that people seemed to be divided between those who believe that they are omnipotent and 'think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it' (1951: vii) and those who experience powerlessness (and fear) in their everyday life. One may ask whether history is repeating itself, but with a new twist, whereby a superrich lobby is trying to establish their plutocratic control over the political process. Should the biopolitical project succeed, an alarming and disastrous outcome might be a society moving downhill, producing a 'proliferation of bandits' — with overtone of 'stupidity', in Cipolla's sense (1976, see also Prato 2020b) — to be put in power and rule over an increasing helpless humanity. The 19 short contributions that follow span Europe, the USA, the Near, Middle and Far East. They offer empirically-informed views on an evolving situation that far too often appears to have been used by unscrupulous, self-interested rulers to breed powerlessness and fear at the expense of democratic rights and liberty. They expose the toll that Covid-19 is taking — not only in terms of loss of lives but also of human suffering and justice. They also raise hopes that humanity is not yet defeated, as long as we will exercise our right to be free from fear.

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Social Complexity, Pathogen Adaptation and Covid-19: History of Disease Avoidance, Social Spacing and Work/Home Matrix

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Introduction

Social distancing and quarantine are not new methods to control and shape epidemics. Invented during the Bubonic Plague in the 14th century in Venice, they have varied as have human responses to isolation. Today separation of workers from co-workers has taken place in a new context.

Current restrictions on work environments have left many people separated from their jobs. This creates several changes in life style. First, the work environment provides individuals with both an income and a sense of worth. Second, the interaction with people at work, typical experiences with others like lunch staff and support crew are reinforcements of social capital where individuals experience generally positive rewards. Thirdly, many people invest considerable emotional support in co-workers, in some cases this has been expressed as pseudo-kinship in a number of forms, for example, the 'work spouse'.

New Forms of Family and Work

In reports of past epidemics families were often trapped in their homes and refused the freedom to exit by authorities. We have good evidence from both Europe (Coulton 1930, Cipolla 1973) and the Middle East (Dols 1977) and ethnohistorical evidence regarding this practice (Caldararo 2012). Often people were aided by authorities if suspected of infection; sometimes they were attacked or driven out. Generally social institutions guided and framed the specific kind of treatment and the responsibility of individuals to act in accordance with rules regarding avoidance.

Background of Trouble in Stay-at-home-Covid-19

Today we find the general population in significantly different contexts due to the change in the nature of modern work, family and associations. People commute for several hours, according to the United States Census Bureau (2017). For couples or families this can create serious problems of association, especially if the adults work different shifts or hours. In general, it means that many families spend little time together. The flight to suburbia in the post-WWII period saw an effort to provide adequate and safe housing (Fossum 1965). This led to isolation and psychological conditions critics attached to developments as Levittown. Gans (1967) argues that these produced supportive communities as in older ones (1951, 1962). The concept of vibrant communities united by extended families or neighbourhood friendships creating foundations for social capital is appealing.

Today more than 70% of all children live in a home where both parents work (Williams and Boushey, 2010).

A telling consequence of the economic shutdown and social distancing has been the increase in child and spousal abuse and lack of food security.

Of interest for ideas and plans of recovery, is the curious nature of individuals who are asymptomatic but test positive for Covid-19. Recent reports from China indicate that 60% of new positive tests show non-symptom individuals. Another issue is whether individuals who have recovered are infectious or can be re-infected. Usually people's immune systems produce antibodies against a pathogen. In the case of Covid-19, some people produce an immune response without symptoms; some other produce a form of antibody that is ineffective and even can enhance the infection and disease progression (Wu et al. 2020, Iwasaki and Yang 2020). These facts might make the idea of effective recovery and containment difficult and confronting a second wave of disease (Yang et al. 2020). This may indicate that the virus is adapting to different populations and subsets of age groups, as in reports of young patients presenting stroke as Covid-19 infection (Oxley et al. 2020).

Many aspects of urban living are under stress, global food chains are failing and food banks in developed countries are running out of supplies. In high concentration population areas where nations' policies have made transportation difficult, many of the poorest are stranded and without access to food (Husain et al. 2020).

Human Responses to Disease: Perceptions, Culture and Fear

Perception shapes response to threat. Already by late April Sweden's Covid-19 numbers are twice those of nearby Denmark that instituted lockdown. Since Sweden's population is nearly twice that Denmark these figures seem to show that no lockdown increased infections, and the effect is not resulting in any change in policy. Norway with half the population of Sweden has about one-third the Covid-19 cases (European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control 2020, Anderson and Pryser Libell 2020). Swedish epidemiologist Anders Tegnell has convinced Sweden it can achieve herd immunity. This has provided the country with a belief in their exception. If people believe they are not in danger, as in the statements of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, their behaviour will follow

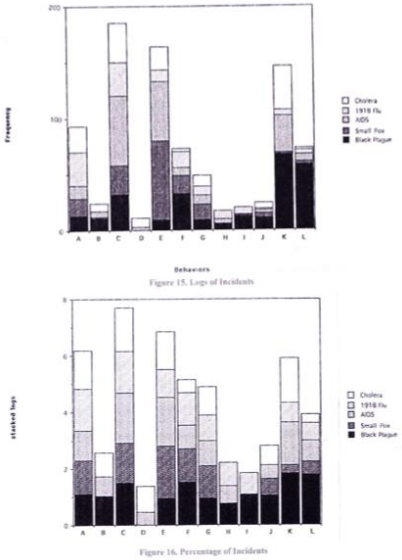

Figure 1. Chart From Caldararo, 2012: Behavioural Responses to Diseases

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Cultural response to disease shows an independent and generally unrelated pattern. Data sources have changed in recent weeks; for example, in France home care infections and deaths were not initially included (Rankin 2020). Reportage of infections and deaths seem to be affected by a number of factors. Reference to historical averages of deaths by season indicate death rates are about 60% higher than normal (Burn-Murdock et al. 2020).

The UK and France have comparable per capita rates but the geographic division fails in comparing Portugal and Greece to Spain and Italy (European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control, 30 April 2020). The connections of the viral strains from China and the transit of individuals (Rutherford 2020) seem to interrelate with cultural and behavioural differences. One additional factor is the socio-economic aspect where we find immigrant groups like the Bame from Somalia in Norway with high rates (Cookson and Milne 2020) in the USA and UK where minorities, especially African Americans, are hard hit by co-morbidities and poverty in housing status and jobs. Many are in low-paid delivery, stocking and clerking positions, as well as health care and care for aged individuals (Yancy 2020).

The use of new technologies and intensive tracing of contacts by government action is a different response and has been effective in South Korea, Germany, Israel and China (Huang et al. 2020). The USA response and in the UK have been disorganized with the exception of some regions, as in California.

A comprehensive study of available ethnographic and historical evidence of human response to disease threat found similarities with of 5 major infectious diseases registering less than 25% agreement; that is, there was no uniform pattern of response (Caldararo 2012). This would indicate perhaps that while the diseases are assumed to be relatively new to human experience, the evolutionary value of uniform behavioural response remains learned or passed down via myth, tales or other cultural means. It seems that humans lack instincts concerning disease or threat recognition (Frey et al. 2010).

We might expect human responses to be based on rational interpretation of signs and signals. Yet our information indicates that fear or perceived threats, as defined culturally, and individuals' experience is processed into risks. Mob behaviour, often described as mass psychogenic disease, is an ill-defined process, especially in the current technological environment (Bartholomew et al. 2012). Evidence from antiquity is often clear on the irrational nature of responses (Hope and Marshall 2000).

We should note that even in cases where adaptations to disease have developed into complex systems, novel disease overcomes them. If social distancing in Covid-19 is adaptive, is resistance to it maladaptive? My 2012 study showed that the patterns of disease response to SARS and MERS differed little from past epidemics. Current responses to Covid-19 show similar behaviour. New technology has allowed quicker identification of the virus, its genome and mechanisms of attack. However, treatment, cures and mobilization have advanced little since SARS and the flu of 1918-1919. Perhaps there is less violence and victimization so far.

Future of Megacities, Increased Population and Dense Living

The background to the response to Covid-19 illustrates a global society where atomization and globally oriented manufacturing and distribution are creating fragility where we expect durability. Like a diversified portfolio of equities and bonds, globalism was supposed to make our world more sustainable. Instead it has brought instability to the remotest parts of the globe.

We face a crossroad to human future. Population density, megacities, waste and pollution produce unsustainable conditions. The isolation of social distancing and economic lockdown seem to deprive human society of the 'hum of the hive', that has become the nature of being human. One of the least focused aspects of resource scarcity until 2001 has been security and safety (Homer-Dixon and Blitt 1998). The inability of nations to provide healthcare and effective response to pandemics is a telling failure.

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A Social Anthropologist in Lockdown

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Giuliana B. Prato's detailed invitation to contribute to this discussion on *City Life and Beyond in Times of Pandemic*, found my attention on the topic aroused by the combined significance of her open letter of 26 March 2020 on the COVID-19 pandemic (Prato 2020), my own observations in the UK and testimonies from the field, in Italy. What follows is a brief account of my professional experience while in lockdown in Kent, England.

As a classically trained social anthropologist, though wary of narrow empiricism, I have a 'natural' aversion to unjustified abstraction (Leach 1977: xvi ff.; Harris 1986: Chap. 1). In my research I have heeded the methodological imperative that the fieldworker needs to become involved in depth in local processes over an extended period of time (Pardo 1996, 2017). Experience during lockdown has undergirded this point. A separate essay will deal with issues of public health, individual freedom, the right to make a living and the politics of fear.

In Italy, I have done extensive fieldwork in the South — especially, though not exclusively, in Naples since the early 1980s — and more recently in Tuscany. Over the years, research in Naples was conducted among ordinary people and élite groups in the media, the medical and legal professions, business, banking, the trade unions and politics (Pardo 2017). Both in Naples and Tuscany, long-term field research continues to be based on participant observation and case studies of people, groups, situations and events. In both research settings, I have been lucky enough to meet and establish strong relationships with many 'Docs' (after William Foote Whyte, 1943), favourite informants from all walks of life who have helped me to orient myself in local dynamics. I am honoured that many of these relationships have grown into enduring friendship and collaboration. Alongside the human aspect — highly valued on both sides — this has meant that between field trips I have been able to keep in touch with local events via telephone, email and Skype.

Under COVID-19, these personal relationships came to a head in an exceptional way, integrating the points excellently brought out by Rutherford (2020) and Prato (2020) and currently debated in the anthropological community. Respectively, what to do when the field cannot be physically reached; and the convenient misrepresentation of COVID-19 as an 'indiscriminate hitter'. Let me explain.

On an early-March Sunday morning I received emails from a friend in Naples and from two friends in Tuscany. Worried that Britain was not doing so well under COVID-19, they enquired about my and my family's health. Those early exchanges started a process that has contributed to reflection on the shortcomings that, regardless of political colour, increasingly mar democratic governance as rulers are seen to be distant from and in conflict with citizens' interests, needs and expectations. In this respect, the Italian testimonies that I shall synthetize below were remarkably close to what I heard, while incarcerated at home, from my British friends and informants. Clearly, superficial differences of political colour aside — Britain is

under Conservative rule; Italy is under the Left, as for many decades have been Naples and its Region and Tuscany — rulers' rhetoric and the fractures in the relationship between citizenship and governance are in many ways interestingly similar, now with deadly consequences and dangerous ramifications. Here, I focus on testimonies from Italy.

That Sunday, I responded to my friends' emails and wrote to other friends in Naples and Tuscany to find about their and their families' health. All except one, a Tuscan, responded. They and theirs were fine. They were in lockdown, too, and described what they were going through. One email typified the others. It read:

> 'We can only take care, try to stay safe and hope for the best, you know. The reality is: A politician has a temperature? Test! Someone famous has a temperature? Test! One of us has a temperature? Call emergency and pray! My brother has all the symptoms of this virus. He has not been tested. One doctor talked to him on the 'phone with no results. Yesterday I drove him to the hospital. Couldn't get in. A sign on the door said "We are closed due to COVID-19"! Meanwhile, the government floods us with injunctions that contradict each other. What a deadly mess!'

Later the Tuscan friend who did not originally reply reported at length on his experience while his brother-in-law and a cousin were in intensive care with COVID.

Within a week, those initial communications grew into intense email exchanges, telephone conversations and Skype meetings, which continue today. The quantity and quality of information also grew, extending beyond personal experience, as accounts, also visual, of neighbourhood life flocked in. When Italians were eventually allowed to go out, my friends reported on life across their city; the Neapolitans noted in annoyance that their city continued to be dirty and dotted with uncollected rubbish.

While Naples experienced infections and deaths, which by July had grown respectively to 1.019 and 142 (mostly elderly and frail), the Tuscan urban setting where I do research suffered minimally from the pandemic: 14 were infected, of whom 3 died in their 80s (in the whole province, a little over 700 were infected and less than 100 died). One of the infected was my friend's cousin, who experienced the trauma of intubation and, then, went through a long but successful period of recovery. He, like most others did not like what the powers-that-be were doing.

Field reports brought out people's resentment of certain influential politicians' promoting a 'hug a Chinese' and 'all will be well' rhetoric. Having made clear that they have nothing against their Chinese neighbours, my friends asked why Chinese nationals who arrived in Italy were not quarantined and why the Chinese communities that, like the large one near Florence, chose to self-isolate should be opposed by local and regional rulers and sanctioned in the dominant government-friendly media. Resonating with their counterparts' anger in Europe and across the Atlantic, my Italian informants are angry at the complacency and arrogance of their rulers, which they see compounded by their government's progressive authoritarian drift and the shroud of secrecy that brands their style, as typified by the pernicious attempt to keep secret

the briefs and scientific reports which have purportedly inspired their questionable decisions (Bocci 2020). This, too, tallies with events in the UK.

My Italian friends' reports illustrate their rulers' politicking, chaotic actions and backfiring attempts to disguise incompetence. They described as unconscionable their conceited rulers' electioneering through late-night broadcasts on national television, announcing progressive limitations on individual freedoms that were received as illogical, contradictory, ambiguous and often at the very limits of the law. Governmental 'decrees' (legislation that is passed without parliamentary debate and approval) ranged from allowing people to drive in 'exceptional circumstances' a car with one passenger sitting in the back and both driver and passenger wearing face masks to making mandatory for people who went out to carry self-declaration forms that changed almost daily and were often in contradiction with each other; from closing public parks (very few Italian urban dwellers have private gardens) to keeping tobacconists open (Italy taxes heavily tobacco products); from allowing illegal immigration to continue (while legal residents could not move outside the council's territorial boundaries) to scattering infected immigrants across the country in overcrowded reception centres, including in previously virus-free Regions; from keeping schools shut to opening dance clubs and tolerating mass street-parties; from decreeing an end to social distancing in trains to reinstating it next day; and so on. When asked, my Italian informants expressed alarm though no surprise that their PM and 6 Cabinet Ministers should be under criminal investigation for the government's mishandling of the crisis (*La Stampa*, 13 August 2020; https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2020/08/13/news/avviso-di-garanzia-a-conte-e-6-ministri-dai-pm-di-roma-1.39190314).

Italy's government's continuing pro-EU rhetoric despite the humiliation from EU's indifference to country's cry for help during the hecatomb of March and April 2020 (Boffey et al. 2020) strengthened my informants' growing contempt for what they see as their rulers' incompetence, arrogance and abuse of power, which, they stress, was long-standing but exacerbated by the current crisis. These themes resonate among my friends in the media, who denounce their 'government's subservience to international powers' and the 'rampant *de facto* censorship', whereby, as one angrily noted,

> 'If you report that COVID-19 originated in China, whose authoritarian handling has allowed it to infect the world, you're branded as a racist. This is absurd, yet very real.'

Mirroring events across Italy, my Neapolitan friends diligently followed rules and stayed at home, venturing out only to buy food or in certifiable emergencies. Meanwhile, they had to watch binging, fighting and drug pushing in the streets beneath their windows and balconies and, particularly in the less affluent areas, immigrants freely peddling objects scavenged from dumpsters. Residents in an area of central Naples on which I have recently written (Pardo 2020) asked the leader of their neighbourhood association to write an open letter to the President of the Regional Council. The letter, widely reported in the media (Garau 2020), in essence reads:

> 'As this Committee has repeatedly and vibrantly brought to the attention of the city administration, the entire area adjacent to the Garibaldi Central Station in Naples and the Vasto-Nolana district are invaded by non-EU citizens […] These have been deaf to the rules and have continued with their gatherings, the small groups on the street, the groups who bivouac hanging around on the sidewalks, exchanging goods taken from the bins or of dubious origin. All this under the astonished eyes of the citizens who live here and can do nothing. Citizens who are locked down in their homes, respectful of regional and national rules, but who live this segregation as yet another hoax that is consumed against them, being unable to intervene or change this situation […] Despite the great help that the police are giving these days for the implementation of the ordinances, the Committee believes that the situation is becoming very dangerous throughout the area […] Therefore, the "Vasto-Nolana" Committee asks you, President De Luca, that the Army be scrambled as soon as possible to patrol the area round the clock in order to defend and protect the health of citizens […]'

As I have indicated in the cited publications, the self-employed and people who work hard to make a living informally account for a large part of the ordinary Neapolitans and Tuscans whom I have met over the years. They have never enjoyed income security and have no access to employment benefits. During the pandemic, none have received help or assistance — monetary or otherwise — from the government, while thousands of local and regional politicians have applied for the €600 coronavirus relief payment and several MPs have received such payment (Giuffrida 2020). Most local friends live in small apartments, only a few enjoy a balcony. Their experience exposes the political myth that the virus is 'indiscriminate' or, as some politicians dared say, 'democratic'; it and its socio-economic (and political) consequences are neither.

A friend who in normal times runs a stall in Naples said:

> 'How dare politicians say we're all in this together when their fat wallets're getting fatter and will get them through it all?! Market's shut. I can't work. No one is helping. Savings are dwindling. My children and wife are barely coping. Nerves are frayed. The neighbourhood is dirtier than ever. Yeah, we'll be all right indeed!' (here, he was referring to the 'all will be well' government's mantra).

A stall-keeper, who usually sells food in Tuscany, said:

> 'Since the government-imposed lockdown and banned street markets, we have all been short on money; many also on food. I am bartering my stock with fellow traders for essentials. Many friends and neighbours can't put food on the table and their kids can't eat at school anymore because schools are closed. It breaks my heart We help as many as we can. For how long, I don't know.'[1]

[1] This kind of solidarity, I learned, was widespread among neighbours and friends in both field sites.

Bringing to mind Prato's remarks (2020), their and their fellow precarious workers' struggle to survive across Italy and beyond, their plight, put to shame the irritating whining of some who are locked down, work from home and continue to enjoy a secure income and trade-union protection. Not to mention, of course, the dedication and sacrifices of a multitude of medical staff and 'essential workers' (this official bad choice of words raises the obvious question, who would be the superfluous workers?).

In closing, I bluntly note that for the sake of associated life in our precious democracy Western rulers would do good to work on restoring, urgently, the covenant with the ruled. They would do good to dispense with politicking, become accountable and truly honour the sacrifices made across the board by those who are helping us all to survive. However 'inconvenient' it may be for them, they badly need to lead responsibly, resist authoritarian temptations and effectively protect our hard-won freedoms.

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Resilience Building in the Time of the Corona Virus

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Introduction

This article reports on the experience of implementation and conclusion of a doctoral research on the relation between learning the English language and increasing resilience in refugee children and youths.

I discuss the difficulties faced by a Ph.D. student from the University of Messina conducting studies in resilience building for refugee and IDP youths in the camps of Duhok Governorate, Autonomous Kurdistan (Northern Iraq). The project was to be concluded onsite in the IDP and Syrian refugee camps during the month of April, 2020 but was blocked due to the COVID-19 emergency. The doctoral research had to be restructured completely. Here, I discuss various challenges created by the COVID-19 virus, including cross-cultural relationship building, cultural blocks, data collection and communication and logistics. The struggle to find viable solutions, finish the job and finally conclude the project could be considered a hands-on example of what the research itself deals with: how to build resilience in adverse conditions. Some observations on resilience itself and how important it has been and will continue to be during the COVID-19 crisis are offered.

What is resilience? It has many definitions. But the definition of resilience as 'the ability to positively adapt and thrive in the face of risk and adversity' (Kong 2015, Masten et al. 2009) is very appropriate for this case.

Although this research defined itself as a pedagogical-psychological study, it ended up sharing many aspects of an anthropological research project. This was due to the very nature of the research, at first based on participant observation and at last being very dependent on the ability of the researcher to 'adjust and adapt to unforeseen circumstances' (Prato 2012: 80). In retrospect, it was totally in agreement with Prato (2012) who pointed out that anthropological research ends up '"crossing" disciplinary, classificatory and spatial boundaries' (Pardo and Prato 2012: 16).

In the fall of 2019, I went to Duhok, Autonomous Kurdistan, Northern Iraq for five weeks. I was hosted by the University of Duhok, in Duhok City, in Autonomous Kurdistan, which is located in northern Iraq. The University was able to obtain a blanket pass from the Kuhok Governorate to go to any of the refugee and IDP camps in the area. I visited several before I selected the Sheikhan IDP Camp and the Domitz Refugee Camp to conduct the research. Sheikhan IDP camp is populated by Yazidis, and Domitz Camp hosts Syrian refugees who are mostly of Kurdish language and culture. I immediately bonded with the children in both camps as well as with their tutors, teachers and caregivers. I was kindly hosted by the NGO VOP.FAM (http://vopiraq.org/) at the Sheikhan Camp, and by the NGO Gashbun at the Domitz Camp (https://www.facebook.com/Gashbun.NGO/). I started the research but the time flew by.

There were many logistical problems and linguistic, cultural and also gender challenges. It took a significant amount of time to make the contacts, form the relationships, find the right methods and finally carry out the research. It was a huge challenge even to find a place to make photocopies, and buying instructional materials was next to impossible. Transport back and forth to the camps was difficult and time-consuming.

One basic problem was gender, which exerted both positive and negative influences (Prato 2012). Because I was a foreign woman alone, I needed to be 'taken care of', and consequently had to work with the schedules of the NGO personnel which sometimes interrupted my research. The fact that I was a foreign woman alone going into the camps, not knowing the language was challenging. On the positive side, it was probably easier for me to establish relationships with people, being of a certain age as well as a female that needed to 'be taken care of' (I ended up being adopted by many Kurdish families and came back 6 kilos heavier). Having an Italian passport with an American cultural-linguistic identity was intriguing for the people, and on top of that being a woman alone who just 'showed up' seemed to inspire in them a sense of protection and respect. Everybody I met was very happy that a Westerner went against all the government travel advisories (both U.S.A. and Italian) and ignored the common belief that going to Iraq was asking to get kidnapped by a terrorist group. However, the fact that although ISIS had supposedly been defeated and the Peshmerga were extremely vigilant with frequent checkpoints, it was still slightly nerve-wracking. But my research got off to a good start. I realized early on that I would have to return to Iraq because the pace was different, it took longer to find contacts, develop relationships, understand cultural interactions, and so on

I started my research but I needed to come back. I fell in love with the children, the people, the culture, and the place, too. The five weeks flew by, I cried all the way to home, and swore I would be back. I kept my promise, I bought a ticket for 900 euros in February, and a graduate student also decided to come with me, assist me and start her thesis research as well.

Results of the Covid-19 Virus

We have a very full schedule planned, including meetings, conferences and university teaching. I was also due to meet with three English teachers who participated in my research and were due to give me the pre-and post-test copies so I could process them for a statistical analysis. Then I was supposed to go to the two camps and teach some courses to different levels of students for two weeks and meet with the Director of the Health Ministry, the Director of the Psychology department and the Medical School and Veterinary Faculties. Fortunately, I had negotiated an MOU agreement (general agreement to do research, exchanges and projects between our two universities) and we were all excited because there were some education and development projects that we wanted to try to work on for funding. I was going to meet as many professors as possible and match them up with research partners from my University. Additionally, I was going to do some presentations of my University to promote exchange and

to get new students. Plus, I was going to take my graduate student friend around so she could start studying human rights issues there.

When the Covid-29 lockdown started in Italy, we began watching the Italian Foreign Ministry site every five minutes. To our chagrin, first Baghdad shut its doors to Italians. Then Kurdistan also! We were absolutely heartbroken.

Logistical Blocks

I wracked my brain about what to do. I decided to offer English courses online. I opened a YouTube channel called '*English for Resilience*'. My friend in the camp who through all of these problems has been steadfast and supportive told me sadly that the people in the camps do not have a good internet connection, and most of them do not have internet access at all, at least for long periods like the hour for an English lesson. It was also not possible to get some of the online programs we were using in Italy; Skype was possible but not reliable there due to the connection, Zoom was unknown and Microsoft Teams out of the question. And watching a YouTube channel was impossible.

Because I could not be there physically, tracking students with a *before* and *after* analysis and conducting interviews became impossible. I was still hoping that the English teachers who were originally helping me would be able to do the ending survey and send both beginning and ending surveys to me somehow. But at the time of writing Iraq is still under lockdown and the schools have been closed for the last four months. A one professor took 184 *whatsup* photos of the survey and sent them to me, but it still was not enough.

Creation of the Survey

Once again, I had to re-invent my research method. It was changed to try to link statistically English as a way to build resilience through a survey which was sent to as many camps as possible. My Ph.D. supervisor came to my rescue by helping me to create a statistically normed survey that we put online. It was easily accessible, took about three minutes to complete and was available from either a computer or a mobile phone.

Cultural and Linguistic Blocks

Besides the fact that I could not physically go back to Iraq, I also felt my inability to speak Kurdish or Arabic even more strongly than when I was there. The survey had to be translated into Kurdish. I had to rely completely on the relationships I had formed in five short weeks last year. I sent the survey for translation to my friend in one part of Iraq, then realized the Kurdish spoken there was not the same as that spoken in the camps in Duhok. So, I sent the translation to a professor in Duhok, who kindly fixed it to be the right kind of Kurdish. Then, I discovered that the people in the camps were unable to read and write Kurdish, although they spoke it. This was due to the Arabization policy started by Saddam Hussein that continues to this day, which has denied most of the people in the camps the opportunity to learn to read and write in Kurdish.

The survey had to be done again in Arabic. All these activities took up the last three months of my research time, and as the deadline for the thesis drew closer, things became more and more stressful because I did not have the research conclusions or proof that learning English increased resilience in refugee children. Fortunately, the Kurds, and especially the people I met, are very generous and willing to help me as much as possible.

Solution

It was hard to communicate what I needed by email or phone calls, and distributing the surveys was extremely daunting. This is where my groundwork in setting up relationships came through to help me. The kind tutor, Maher al-Issa, at the Sheikhan IDP Camp, came to my rescue and went around to all of the children in the camp during lockdown. He gathered more than enough surveys for a statistical sample. He used his own phone and time to do this and would not hear of being paid.

Success at the Last Minute

At the last minute, the statistical analysis was conducted, the first draft of the thesis was finished and I was amazed to see that my research actually showed a connection between learning English and increasing resilience in refugee children! It was what I had set out to do! The survey is still open online and I have more than doubled my participants. The research conclusions are holding steady.

In looking back over the process of doing this doctoral research during the time of the Covid-19 virus, I realize that I was actually living my thesis: building resilience to overcome adversity; thrive in difficult circumstances. It was like what Anne Deveson said in her book on resilience: 'What begins as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in minds, brains and bodies' (Deveson 2003: 38).

Somehow, I found a way to use the everyday magic of relationship building, creative problem solving, believing in something important, find out something important. The actual components of resilience. And I survived, and so did my thesis.

The relationships I made were the key to finishing my thesis. As far as being able to establish the necessary relationships to carry out research, I completely agree with Giuliana B. Prato when she says '[…] no matter how "prepared" we think we are, the success of the fieldwork ultimately depends on the fieldworker as a person who interacts with other persons, who evaluates situations as they happen, and to say the least, adjusts to changes and adapts to unforeseen circumstances' (2012: 80).

I think that the current situation of the world facing the Covid-19 is similar to my thesis saga. We have to build strong relationships, employ creative problem solving, be persistent, maintain our hope for the future and believe in something bigger. If we are able to do this, we

will not only be successful, but come out as better people and the world will be wiser and stronger for it.

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Learning to Live Differently: The Pandemic and the 'Delhites'

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Delhi is an ancient city. It has gone through many traumas, from invasions by the Turks and Mongols, establishment of colonial rule, post-colonial Partition, periodic epidemics and political turmoil to, finally, a pandemic. Some residents have lived here for generations, almost since the city was founded in its present form in the 17th century by the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan; some came only in the recent past. Like all other ortho-genetically evolved cities, it is a patchwork of old residential neighbourhoods, a citadel-like central structure showcasing it as the capital city of India, spacious and sprawling bungalows and newly emerging neighbourhoods, both shanties and luxurious gated apartments. The city has undergone speedy gentrification after the liberalization of the economy in 1992, when glittering malls and arcades, post-modern architectural structures of multinational companies and transnational hotels and restaurants have begun to dot the city and its skyline. These have been built, as Kuldova (2017: 39) points out, 'on violent expulsions and, paradoxically, on the labour of those expelled'.

In March 2020, it was business as usual. Then, a message from the Prime Minister Mr Modi, delivered at 8 pm came as a bolt from the blue: the city (and most of India) was to be under lockdown from mid-night the same day (22 March). It sent people into a flurry; shops, raided for essential goods, groceries and household items, soon wore emptied-out looks. However, for many, the psychological impact was the most devastating. They could not comprehend what had happened. Most people were unaware of what a pandemic was; what was the danger? Almost everyone in India is familiar with seasonal epidemics, and as soon as the weather changes people start talking about which 'season' it is. It used to be malaria and cholera at one time; now it is dengue and maybe typhoid. But no one had any living memory of a pandemic of this COVID-19 proportions.

The most pitiful outcome of the lockdown began to be felt about 2-3 months later, when Delhites (as the people of Delhi are fond of calling themselves) woke up to find long lines of desperate people, some with children on their shoulders and arms, some with their women folk and many without, trudging along with weary treads, trying desperately to reach somewhere. Very few people, especially those from the middle and upper classes have ever realized the price at which all the glitter that they have become used to comes. They have been blissfully unaware of a huge underbelly of the city inhabited by migrant workers — people pushed out of the rural countryside, who come to the city to eke out a living. In Zizek's (1993) terms they were holding the Real of the social reality at bay. The pandemic and consequent lockdown exposed the mass exploitation of labour in the informal sectors of the economy, where many were being paid even less than the minimum officially designated wages. The façade of glitter and spaciousness that one experiences when entering the city of Delhi, hides a vast majority living under miserable conditions of bare survival. Many are huddled inside one room tenements in congested neighbourhoods and slums. A large number of people have no access

to proper sanitation and drinking water, and have no way of maintaining the hygiene that is required for containing the epidemic. The sprawling slums of a city like Delhi are a direct outcome of the failure of the state to live up to the democratic ideals. It is a betrayal of the trust that people put into an elected government that often fails them (Pardo 2019).

There are regions of India, like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, that suffer from abject poverty, especially of the landless lower castes, who have traditionally been living on the edge. They put in inhuman amounts of labour yet get little more than a pittance from the landed upper and dominant castes who rule in these areas. During my fieldwork in Rajashan in 2016, I came across one such community exploited and marginalised by the landowning dominant groups that deprived them of the one key resource, in this region, water. The community had no other means of survival than to move for seasonal labour to the nearby cities (Channa 2019). The lack of amenities in backward regions ensures that the big cities get their steady supply of cheap migrant labour.

The lockdown led to the closure of many businesses, shops, restaurants, hotels and practically all informal sector enterprises, like road-side vending, fruit and vegetable selling, and so on. It affected all service providers, like barbers, plumbers, carpenters and launderers. I had conversations with representatives from the community of dhobis (traditional launderers) who told me how they had lost all their work and were dependent on their small savings and what occasional work they could find. The daily wage workers coming in from the poorer regions of the country were the hardest hit. They were thrown out of work, as most of the employers, being small-time business people themselves, did not have the resources to keep paying them wages without earning any profits. Some, compassionately gave some money for a month or two, but then these small trickles also dried up. Domestic workers employed in the houses of more prosperous families were put on half wages or helped with groceries and loans by their employers, but this did not apply to those who ran a small self-run business or who worked for daily wages. The latter were left penniless and shelterless, as the landlords turned them out for not paying the rent; so, they found themselves out in the open at the time of the pandemic, when, because of lockdown, all people were being asked to stay at home. With no public transport and no means of travel with the shutting down of metro rails buses, taxis and trains, many of them had no option but to attempt to reach home on foot.

The media gloated over the tragic images of pregnant women, little children and tired families walking in the heat and dust with practically no food and water to sustain them. Jolted into action, the state suddenly woke up and so did the middle classes and the rich in their gated apartments and luxurious houses. Massive efforts were made to provide food and temporary shelters to these people. The government in Delhi converted all the state-run schools into shelters for the homeless migrants and also provided free food. Free groceries were given to the poor families. But most felt it was too little, too late. At this time, the city was almost emptied of those who had come to it with dreams in their eyes but who had had to leave with only disappointment.

The state was on the verge of losing its legitimacy, in spite of the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Prime Minister of the country addressing the people on prime-time television, giving them assurances and stating that they were being responsible and caring. But to the people harassed on the roads by overzealous policemen's bullying and beating who considered them 'offenders' for breaking the lockdown rules, the state appeared more authoritarian than authoritative (Prato 2019). Many people were even jailed for jumping curfews. The elderly, the sick, women in labour and people with chronic illnesses needing immediate hospital and medical care were often left with no help, many succumbing in the process.

But there were some positive aspects of the crisis. The massive movement of migrants, who were seen all over the city walking along the sidewalks and even in the middle of the road, the images of them dying by the roadside or on railway tracks, shook the conscience of many of the privileged classes, who had been blissfully unaware of the realities of their own city, who lived in a bubble, believing that everything was fine. This sudden exposure to the stark reality of extreme poverty stimulated the aforementioned empathetic actions, like providing food and other support to the poor, but also led to much self-reflexive meditations.

There was also a rediscovery of simple pleasures long left behind in the rush for office and the city traffic jams, in the long waits at the petrol stations and the crowded metro trains. People connected to friends and families using various forms of digital technology. Spare time was devoted to looking up grandma's cookbooks, and sharing pictures of new dishes and exchanging recipes become a favourite hobby for many women and even some men.

India is a country where people rely on domestic help to a very large degree. Suddenly housewives had to deal with all the housework as the help could not come or were not allowed to come in for fear of infection. The men, stranded at home with the offices closed, found that their wives were actually doing a lot of work that was invisible to them until they also had to do it. Even while families rebounded, domestic violence increased.

In the last month or so (I write this in July 2020), there has been a relaxation of lockdown, but life has not come back to normal. Far from it. Today, when I go out very occasionally and fearfully to the markets in the city, they appear deserted. Even though the lockdown is over, there are no customers in the shops, the roads are empty, there is an eerie feeling in the air. It feels like a nightmarish science fiction movie, where all life has disappeared. The city is now a shadow of its old self. In normal times, I hated the traffic and the noise, but now with the clean air and the empty streets, I sometime wish the noise and rush would come back. The city has lost its smells and its sounds. The poor who left the city have taken its life with them.

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Reflecting on the Pandemic

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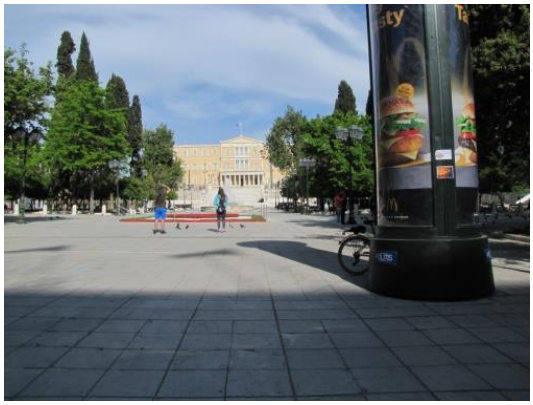
Introduction

I was one of the lucky ones. During lockdown I was able to stay at home and enjoy the privilege of staying safe. Even before the Greek state's first official announcement regarding the restrictions and measures that needed to be taken in order to slow the spread of the new coronavirus, I was already working from my 'home' office, protecting myself and my loved ones, especially since members of my immediate family were considered to be high-risk patients. This was easy, due to the nature of my profession — I am an architect. Within a few days, the Stay at Home recommendation became mandatory for all citizens, especially since a neighbouring country had been hit so hard by the first wave of the pandemic. The national lockdown imposed by the Greek government lasted almost two months. Restricting public gatherings and social contact seemed the obvious response to the unknown virus and the unforeseeable risks that came along with it. Only at the begging of May it was decided that restrictions could begin to be lifted.




Figures 1 and 2. Lockdown was the longest period of quiet in recorded human history. The centre of Athens as never seen before. Photos by the author, April 2020.

Those of us who were able to stay indoors during that time found this to be a unique experience**.** Apart from the daily routine that involved cleaning and sanitizing, going out for groceries or to the pharmacist, exercising, and so on, staying at home also meant that everyday life would suddenly lose its pace. One could simply stay at home and enjoy the benefits of being cosy inside, read a book, listen to one's favourite music, even get some extra sleep. It was an unprecedented period of peace and quiet. *Lockdown was indeed the longest period of quiet in recorded human history* (Basu 2020).[1] Suddenly, everything stopped. Suddenly, nothing

[1] Basu (2020) significantly notes, 'Under normal circumstances, the human noise merges with and muffles natural seismic activity. Exactly how much our behaviour affects the levels of background noise has been hard to work out until now. Lockdown presented a unique opportunity for researchers not only to control for human activity but also to hear seismic noise that otherwise gets drowned out.'

happened. Suddenly, there was more time to think about our loved ones, reflect on our lives; reflect on our own existence and how fragile it is.

State of Uncertainty

During lockdown, news coverage — in newspapers and the web — revolved around the coronavirus crisis and what it might bring. The same articles reappeared each day, addressing the very same questions over and over again but offering no specific answers to their readers: What are the symptoms of the coronavirus disease? Can you get Covid-19 twice? Will there be a vaccine for Covid-19? How soon can we expect it? What happens if a coronavirus vaccine is never developed? The incoming information was either contradictory or false.

Gaining scientific knowledge of a new virus is a long process. It requires collecting sufficient empirical data. In this case, there are, for the time being, no reliable scientific results that could help us eliminate the further spread of Covid-19; at the same time, treatment seems to be a farfetched case scenario. All scientific theories on the new virus remain on the verge of scientific hypotheses. This kind of scientific uncertainty generates a feeling of public discomfort and conflict both on the social as well as on the political level.[2] Policy makers and environmental regulators often look to the scientific community for absolutes and certainty. This, however, is not always possible, which is the case with Covid-19. Since the begging of the pandemic the official health guidelines presented by the governments have been constantly changing depending on new scientific, economic and social data that came to light. Even so, these guidelines are not always so easy to follow.[3]

T.P. is an architect living in the centre of Athens**.** He is also a long-distance runner. His daily schedule was disrupted when essential travel guidelines were imposed during Covid-19 lockdown, forcing him to cease his mountain training. In order to keep up with his daily routine, he and his fellow athletes trespassed on the fenced park in a nearby hill. Although Athens is a densely populated city, during lockdown almost all parks were closed to the public and only a few green areas were left which people could freely access. Nevertheless, once the lockdown was lifted, social gatherings increased dramatically in city squares and outdoor spaces. T.P. pointed out:

> ‘This is an inconsistency to the previous condition that we experienced [...] There was no point in closing down the few parks remaining. This made things worse for

[2] Most people think of scientific uncertainty as an absence of knowledge. However, in science, uncertainty is used as a measurement to tell us how well something is known. Scientific uncertainty generally means that there is a range of possible values within which the true value of the measurement lies. See *Scientific Uncertainty*, https://dosits.org/decision-makers/scientific-uncertainty/

[3] For instance, spatial analysis by Esri UK (2020) has found that most pavements in Britain are less than three metres wide, making it difficult for pedestrians to remain two metres apart and follow government guidelines for social distancing. Using measurements from Ordnance Survey, Esri UK has created a map of all pavement widths, discovering that only 30% of Great Britain’s pavements are at least three metres wide. In the case of Athens, the statistics are much lower.

people who were confined in their homes. It is much more difficult to catch the virus outdoors, as long as people do not gather and maintain social distancing rules. So, what was the point in closing everything down?'

'Nations cohere and flourish on the belief that their institutions can foresee calamity, arrest its impact and restore stability' (Kissinger 2020). In western culture we are more or less inclined to associate good governance with the notions of political stability and ideological certainty. Recognizing potential risk and being able to foresee change is essential to politics because it determines how administrations address citizens and set their political agendas. Forecasting is a process also entangled with the latest achievements of science and technology. However, the Covid-19 pandemic did exactly the opposite by generating an instability that engendered public disbelief towards the political apparatus. The coronavirus broke the health care systems in developed countries, 'reminding' us that radical change is a fundamental characteristic of life itself and that our true knowledge of the world we live in is extremely limited.

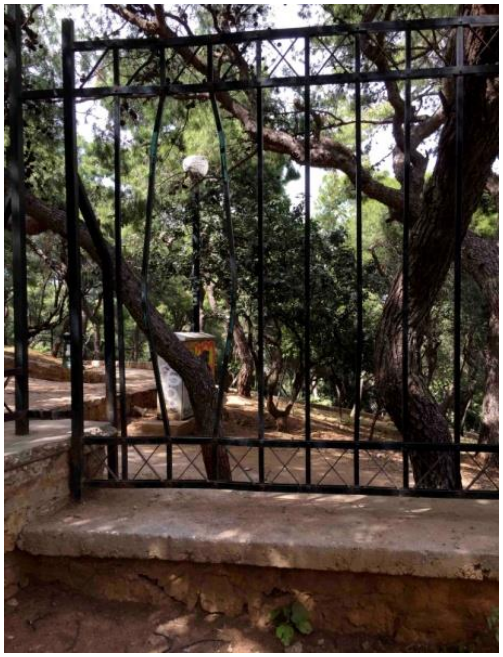


Figure 3. In order to keep up with their daily training athletes access the hill through an opening in the fence. Photo by the author and T.P., May 2020.

Awaiting the Return to Normal

In Samuel Becket's play *Waiting for Godot*,[4] Estragon and Vladimir are eagerly waiting for Godot to arrive, but he never does. The play premiered in New York at the John Golden Theater in 1956, startling its audience. While New York intellectuals puzzled over the meaning of

[4] The play illustrates the absurdity of human existence, only shortly after the second world war that left behind widespread destruction and more than 60 million casualties.

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Godot,[5] in November 1957 the American production was taken to the San Quentin prison. The 'captive' audience of San Quentin, inmates sentenced to life, understood the play immediately. Inmates knew well what the waiting game was all about: waiting for the mail, for appeal, for pardons; waiting with nothing happening, doing time. As the inmate reviewer wrote for the San Quentin News (28 November 1957), 'We are still waiting for Godot and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part for ever — but then there is no place to go.' (quoted in Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 622).

In *Waiting for Godot* literally nothing happens. There is no action taking place, no begging, no middle and no ending. The two main characters of the play repeatedly ask each other:

Estragon: *How do we pass our time?*

Vladimir: *We are waiting for Godot*.

But Godot never shows up and this is disturbing for the audience. Becket's play triggers emotions such as emptiness, malaise, desolation, uncertainty and angst; feelings quite similar to those experience in a state of physical confinement.

Physical confinement and social distancing during lockdown triggered some of those feelings *while awaiting the return to normal*. However, within a few weeks it became clear that the impact of the pandemic will stay with us for a long time, maybe even for years. In addition, not being able to touch each other altered the ways we communicate and interact and affected us strongly on an emotional level.[6] Physical distancing becomes almost emotional.

Depending on their home environment and housing situation, each person reacts differently during lockdown, either suffering occasional panic attacks, fearing of becoming sick, fearing for one's job, fearing financial disaster, fearing death, or spending quality time with loved ones, with oneself, having a holyday.

[5] God? Happiness? Eternal life? Christian Salvation? The Future by definition never present? (The Faber Companion, *Ackerley, Gontarski,* 2004: 622*).*

[6] Linden significantly says, 'There are two touch systems. One that gives the "facts" — the location, movement, and strength of a touch — and we call that discriminative touch. But then there's the emotional touch system. It's mediated by special sensors called C tactile fibers, and it conveys information much more slowly. It's vague — in terms of where the touch is happening — but it sends information to a part of the brain called the posterior insula that is crucial for socially-bonding touch. This includes things like a hug from a friend, to the touch you got as a child from your mother, to sexual touch [...] It's not just a different kind of information that's conveyed by the same sensors in the skin that allow you to feel a quarter in your pocket. It's a completely different set of sensors and nerve fibers that wind up in a different part of your brain.' (cited in Stromberg 2015).

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Figure 4. A typical Greek Condominium. During lockdown the balcony becomes vital to households, serving most of us as the safe in-between space to the outside world. Photo by the author, January 2020.

During lockdown one thing became crystal clear: we are not all on the same boat when it comes to a disaster of this scale. Over the past decades public policies have been undermining the Welfare State and its impact on national economies. But during lockdown it became crystal clear that diminishing medical care and public health services could be catastrophic regarding social cohesion.

Soon after restrictions were lifted, many governments attempted to restore their political power and lost credibility. In an attempt to reinstate administrations' political authority, a less than democratic approach has been often followed, from the recent enactment of the Security Law in China, undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and its independent judiciary system,[7] to the violent police response to the George Floyd incident. In some cases, the socio-political reaction to such an approach has been almost as abrupt and violent as the pandemic. After a period of unprecedented quiet and peace, life is struggling to find its pace. Nonetheless, things will never be the same. Is this a bad thing? Only time will tell.

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[7] See, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838

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The Coronavirus Exceptional Days: From the Anthropologist's Personal Perspective

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Nearly thirty years ago I published a paper titled 'Exceptional Experiences in Everyday Life' (C*ultural Anthropology*, 7 (2) 1992: 232-243). It was then an unusual piece of writing unrelated to my ethnographic engagements. The experiences in that record related to encounters with unforgettable, seemingly 'extraordinary' incidents in my life history, defined as 'typically have an arbitrary beginning and ending out of the stream of chronological temporality. Although these events usually lack any relationship to major passages in our life cycle, they leave strong marks on the map of our life experiences'. However, the extraordinary events I related in that paper seem to represent a totally different category compared with the surrealistic existential experiences, the subject of the present account, recorded and written during the coronavirus confinement days of March-May 2020.

Preparing for a New York Visit

My story started with the scheduled trip to participate at the Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA) meeting in Albuquerque (March 16-21). As usual, whenever I travel to the US, I include a week stop-over in New York, where I feel at home. Since the early 1980s, NYC has become my anthropological 'fieldwork' site (1988, 1995/2003, 2015).

Although one could already notice the first signs of the coronavirus impact in some parts of the world, I refused to believe that the corona clouds were moving on from the markets and towns of China toward the borders of Western societies. Thus, I made my way to Ben Gurion airport on March 8, as scheduled long ago.

A Hectic Week in New York

Arriving early on Sunday, I was ready to attend the morning service at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) at West 36 Street, a site I studied as part of my research on gay organizations in NYC (2015). A buoyant NYC experience, but now a sort of an intuitive precaution grappled me on listening to the early morning news about the coronavirus casualties. On entering the sanctuary, I noticed the place was somewhat less crowded than usual, but the friendly warm ambience appeared to me mostly unchanged. After the service, I went with Don — my close informant and friend at MCC — for our 'traditional' brunch at a nearby restaurant. Reminiscing on earlier days, we discussed the delicate dilemma concerning the socio-emotional-ethical borders of intimate relationships between researchers and their informants-friends in the 'field'.

I spent a pleasant sunny Monday morning walking along the spectacular High Line (the elevated freight track transformed into a linear park), viewing both sides of the Hudson river

and visiting the Whitney Museum of American Art where I unexpectedly encountered David Rosen, Professor of Anthropology at Fairleigh Dickenson University in New Jersey. I had met David only a few months earlier at the country home of a mutual friend in Israel. In retrospect, this was among the unforgettable social encounters I experienced before I returned to Tel Aviv a few days later.

My next Monday programme included an evening visit to CBST (Congregation Beth Simchat Torah), the gay synagogue Purim celebration service. The sanctuary was not packed as expected, and I could identify only very few from among the older crowd, members of my research days in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Was this an augur of the curtailment of public activities? On arrival back home, I was informed that my SFAA meeting in Albuquerque was cancelled. The ostensible reason for my trip!

Tuesday, the first thing in the morning, I called my travel agent and asked him to change my flight itinerary. Afterwards, I walked instead of taking the subway to Hudson Yard complex of museum, shops, entertainment, business and residence, constructed recently over a rail yard. I visited Agnes Denes' Drawings exhibit, but the site seemed somewhat deserted. Before leaving, I purchased a ticket for the Shed theatre company next evening performance.

A few hours later, I went out for dinner with a couple of close friends, both successful professionals, going back to my study of Israeli emigrants during the early 1980s. We avoided the usual warm hugs and kisses, and I was advised to take precautions of hand washing in particular.

In the meantime, my Israeli travel agent suggested a return flight home on Monday evening. I was pleased with that travel schedule, which offered a full week stay in NY, fulfilling my wish to experience again the city and meet with friends I cherished.

Wednesday morning, I visited the Morgan Library, hosting an enormous collection of rare books, original manuscripts and first editions of famous authors, poets, art exhibits, etc. From there I walked up to the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) to view also my cherished surrealist painter de Chirico's illustrations of empty city squares, that have always attracted me. Then, I took the subway — not crowded at this early afternoon hour — to visit my favourite Strand book store on Broadway and 12st. I looked for books that might get me through the two-week home-quarantine I faced on my return to Israel. Towards evening, I met with Ed, my close NY friend who had followed my work, advised me on gay issues and also helped editing some writings since my early entry to the field. We had a Chinese dinner at a nearly empty Sammy's Noodles. I wondered, had not the 'national identity' of that popular culinary site kept away the ordinary clientele?

The coat check at the Metropolitan museum I visited on Thursday was closed, an early indication of the forthcoming public spaces distancing restrictions. After viewing the exhibition on Africa's Sahel empires, I walked to the nearby Guggenheim museum (coat check closed, but packed as usual), hosting Rem Koolhaas' exhibit — 'Countryside, the Future' (in retrospect, a prophetic statement about the near-future exodus from New York of those privileged to be able to do that). I was soon informed that the MET would close next day, though no plans had been

announced yet about the Guggenheim. I grasped I was watching the last scenes of the NY visit script.

I was not surprised when informed that the play at the Shed theatre was cancelled, leaving me with the already cash-paid ticket valid for a later date performance. I left the ticket to Ed with whom I had a take-out sandwich dinner on a bench in a nearby park. It was the first time in many years we had dinner seated at an open space bench.

Friday morning, the breakfast date with my CBST friend Jill was cancelled. She had to pick up her daughter who needed to vacate immediately her dorm after her college abruptly closed. I visited the Himalayan exhibit at the Rubin museum; it was the last open day, free of entry charge, and with only a few visitors. Was I the last caller to switch off New York lights before departure?

On my return to the apartment, I answered an angry phone call from my son who admonished me for irresponsible behaviour delaying my return flight to next Monday. I should have comprehended the magnitude of the Corona danger and taken the earliest flight going home. I took his exhortation to heart and called on my travel agent to change my home back itinerary. I spent the rest of the afternoon at the Strand bookstore and took a book I had checked out a few days earlier. On my return, I found the travel agent's message confirming an El Al flight back to Tel Aviv on Saturday night.

I spent Saturday morning walking to meet with another Israeli couple — a walk across town I would not have taken on foot in earlier days, but now avoided public transport. It became a closing chapter of my visit, discussing American and Israeli current social-political issues.

On my way back to the apartment, I stopped in a supermarket across the street. It was crowded as I had never seen before; it was a long queue to pay for my few items. All around me New Yorkers were filling their shopping carts, stocking up their carts with hefty amounts of foodstuff as if preparing for an impending war. Suddenly, NY was not the safe haven usually envisaged from the Israeli perpetual stage of political-security hazards and distresses. I collected my bags and headed to Newark Airport.

In retrospect, I am reminded of a dismaying experience I encountered nearly twenty years ago arriving to the Netherlands for a research meeting. I had to reschedule my flights itinerary as consequence of the 9/11 events. Those events made travel procedure more tiring and time consuming but did not affect the volume of world travel. The Corona's impact would have far more serious consequences on travel and personal life.

Back in Tel Aviv

The El Al plane to Tel Aviv seemed half empty with only one passenger placed at the tourist compartment's three seats rows. In Israel, all newcomers had to enter a two-week quarantine. I discovered the power of modern surveillance technology when, a few days later, a phone call from a police officer investigated my whereabout.

Luckily, I had no difficulty spending that incarceration verdict fully occupied with the page proofs for my forthcoming book *Can Academics Change the World?* (Berghahn 2020).

But as soon as I completed that task and the confinement period, I joined my compatriots in following the Israelis rule of 100-metres allowed movement from their apartments.

As the Covid-19 was identified as risky for older people in particular, I recalled my fieldwork days in NYC during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the AIDS plague caused a public scare before it was considered as mostly a gay people affliction. Now, older people were considered vulnerable of the new life-threatening hazard; I was a member of this risky age-group 'minority'. It may sound an invented horror story, a few days after arriving in Tel Aviv, I was informed that my colleague and friend, William Helmreich, sociologist at CUNY, had succumbed to the Covid-19, aged 74 and in good health. We usually met during my visits, but this time I hesitated calling him, I was somewhat disconcerted about my changed NY schedule. Was this a fortunate missed get-together? I dedicate that trip record to the memory of Willie, a distinguished urban sociologist — with whom I shared the New York fascination — and author of *The Manhattan Nobody Knows* (Princeton U.P. 2018).

In retrospect, I could have cancelled the NY-Albuquerque trip. There were enough warning signs of what was to come. But I refused to succumb to what appeared to be a sort of public panic; also, I needed to break the monotony of daily life at home, campus, national politics, and so on. I admit, I do not regret the apparently irresponsible decision to go ahead with the travel plan. However, whatever the moral lesson of my comportment, I was fortunate, indeed!

Undoubtedly, my coronavirus hectic days in New York and the aftermath at home are not comparable with the personal 'exceptional experiences' recorded in the 1992 account. The coronavirus had gravely impacted the lives of millions around the globe. Ironically, preparing for the incarceration weeks, I bought the recently published *Gods of the Upper Air* (King 2019) presenting the life story of Franz Boas and his close students — Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, in particular — who reflected from their research experiences about their own home society and personal life. I reflect the other way this time, from the personal experience to a wider borderless social arena.

Coping with the Plague's Distresses

Confined at home for nearly two months in a Tel Aviv suburb, I could learn about the 'human' consequences from the daily media reports, phone calls and e-mail messages from colleagues and friends. The national daily news reported also on the growing tensions and violence in many family households and on socio-cultural enclaves effected by the epidemic, the ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods in particular.

The epidemic perplexity had inevitably integrated into the Israeli national political chaos following the third election campaign to the Knesset within one year. A transitional government with no legal legitimate status, functioning under endless coalition forming deliberations, had to take immediate emergency decisions, choosing a total closure of most public activities. Incarcerated at home, the Israeli public followed the daily two-parts drama news: information on pandemic patients' statistics and orders of comportment in the public forum, versus the last

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bickering coalition negotiations raising claims of betrayal on all sides. This time, PM Netanyahu did not follow his mate President Trump's strategy of dismissing the seriousness of the epidemic. Mr Netanyahu seemed to enjoy his daily TV emergency addresses to the nation, informing about the current disease statistics, warning against misbehaviour in the public and home domains, displaying the proper way of wearing face masks, and so on. Media observers interpreted these appearances as part of a personal PM campaign. In May, a new coalition government gradually relaxed the distancing rules, which had been criticized as over-reaction. The enormous economic, social and human-emotional cost and suffering that had brutally affected many thousands of citizens have not yet been fully assessed.

By the end of May, most public places and activities had fully or partly reopened (not including cultural-entertainment hall performances). Except for the imposed rules, it became mostly a personal choice of the degree of distancing and interaction in close and public sites.

How did I endure the two-months incarceration? After proofreading my forthcoming book, I nurtured the idea of recording the last New York experience, another chapter following the earlier report of 'exceptional experiences in everyday life'. No doubt, I was among those privileged 'internees' who could, partly at least, continue with their usual professional occupation.

At this junction I relate to Albert Camus' *The Plague*, having read it again after completing the above text. I bear witness to a colossal traumatic situation that would certainly produce many dramatic accounts by individuals from all walks of life, nations and occupations, who went through experiences far more distressing and costly than those reported. However, the sheer activity of recording that predicament, as well as revisiting the enthralling week stay in New York, gave meaning and compensated for the weeks and months wasted by the ostensibly abnormal life chronicle.

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The Unusual Frontier-worker

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I am a 'border-worker'. However, I am one of the few in the category who moves between two countries not for economic but for family reasons. Instead of working in wealthy Switzerland and living in the less opulent Italy, as the vast majority of cross-border commuters do, I live in Switzerland and work in Italy. Even worse, I do not work in the north of Italy (for example, in Lombardy to then move to the Italian-speaking Canton Ticino) but in the southernmost part, Sicily.

Thus, like the many regular intra-European travellers, I managed to live with the Covid-19 emergency for about a month, often flying from the Milan Linate Airport, and then renting car on arrival in Sicily at Catania Airport in order to avoid public transport. This lasted until a warm morning of early March, when I was almost diverted to a Parisian airport to spend 14 days in isolation there. Luckily, I managed to reach Geneva Airport and from there go by train to the village where my family lives. I arrived just in time, because a few hours later the situation worsened, especially in northern Italy. Then, all face-to-face teaching in my University in Messina was replaced by remote activities.

What follows starts on the day of my arrival in Switzerland and ends on 11 May 2020. My Sicilian encounter with Covid-19 will be discussed elsewhere.

The Setting

Yvonand, where I live, is a municipality in the French-speaking, mostly Protestant Jura-Nord Vaudois district, Vaud Canton. It has a territory of 1,339 square km and borders with the mostly Catholic Fribourg Canton. Located on the southern shore of Lake Neuchatel, on the Payerne-Yverdon-les-Bains railway line, it largely lies in the Grand Cariçaie nature reserve. It has a bank, post office, three supermarkets, two boulangeries and half a dozen restaurants. Half of the 3,400 inhabitants live in the centre, where there is a library, a fire station and two churches: the Temple d'Yvonand, parish seat of the Reformed Evangelical Church and the church of Saint Pierre, part of the Catholic parish of Yverdon-les-Bains. The inhabitants of Yvonand are called *tapa-sablia*, nickname for *tape-sable* (source of sand), due to the presence on the territory of one of the few sandy beaches on the south coast of the lake. Crossed by the Menthue River, the town is a renowned tourist place, especially for internal tourism from the Swiss-German cantons, but with a substantial presence of visitors also from the nearby French Jura. It has several campsites, tourist resources and a marina-port capable of hosting 500 boats. Most inhabitants work in nearby Yverdon-les-Bains, or in Fribourg and Lausanne. The local gendarmerie was closed on 17 March as a consequence of the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the Canton.

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Our Apartment at the Time of the Pandemic

We live on the ground floor and have a small garden. There are four members in our household. The children have one room each, my wife and I our own room; then there is a combined living-room and kitchen and two bathrooms. We have a desk with a computer and two PCs. We enjoy stable friendships in a mixed, heterogeneous neighbourhood as is often the case in Switzerland. The most recent friendships are the parents of our children's schoolmates, who attend the local Elementary School. Some of them are also neighbours, others live in the vicinity. Our children usually go to shared meeting places and regularly enter their schoolmates' homes because we know their parents. Their classmates normally come to our home, mainly in the afternoon for a snack. This was the norm before 13 March 2020. From that day everything changed.

Apart from the news in the media, that day a notice from the Municipality of Yvonand appeared on the door of our apartment building (Figure 1). The document formalized what we already knew from the publicised directives. The document listed limitations that were not as stringent as those in Italy, but were sufficiently limiting as to make us understand that our individual and collective life habits were to change dramatically. The document focused on how to act in the event of symptoms attributable to Covid-19 and on the official means of communication that the municipality would use (the Facebook account and Municipality portal). A few hours later, further notices arrived by letter and by telephone. Among these, of particular concern to us were the suspension of the *maman-de-jour* activity (cantonal home-reception service for children during non-school hours) and the suspension of school activities. These occurred with immediate effect for four weeks (later extended for an additional two weeks). As for moving around, the children had to limit themselves to what was necessary.

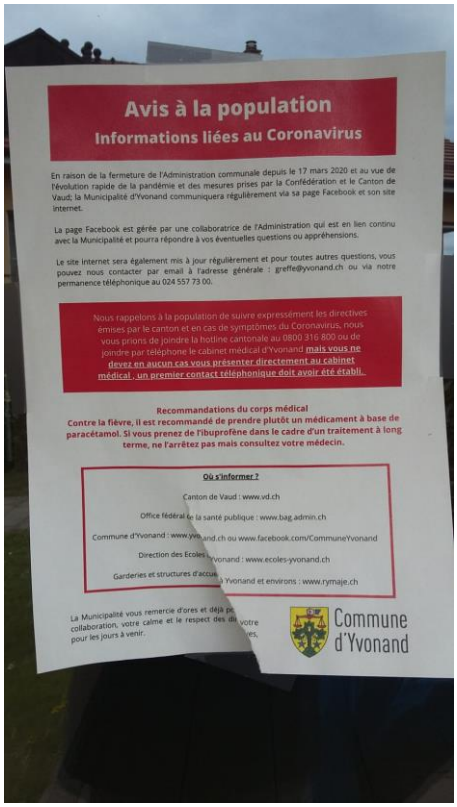

Figure 1. Municipality of Yvonand: Formal notification of restrictions. Photo by the Author.

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However, limits on gatherings were not stringent, in fact it was possible to meet in a group of maximum 5 people, observing the proper distance. There were no limits to the use of private vehicles or upon the number of passengers in a car; however, limits were imposed on the use of public transport. From the next day, restrictions extended to public spaces, including the natural reserve and nature trails (Figure 2), as well playgrounds and recreational activities areas. After a few days, sports areas, especially those close to the Municipal Stadium, were also closed (Figure 3). Then public administration premises were closed, and access to public services (for instance, the Post Office) and supermarkets limited.

Figure 2. Notice of closure of the nature reserve. Photo by the Author.

Figure 3. Notice of closure of sport areas. Photo by the Author.

The multinational company where my wife works had already imposed smart working from home. The circumstances that made this mandatory included the possibility of having been in 'contact' with someone who had been in Italy. From first 'contact', one had to

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quarantine for two weeks; in our case, the quarantine had paradoxically already been extended twice because I continued to travel to Italy and she was consequently unable to return to work.

From 13 March the quarantine and the negotiation of spaces and schedules at home involved all the four of us. First, we had to re-shape our going out, meetings and management of common spaces. Above all, this had to be explained to our children. They were accustomed to continuous contact with others and, in their eyes, what we proposed seemed like a form of long-term imprisonment.

Mostly because of my travelling, at least for the first weeks, my children suffered from the lockdown more than their mates. I was critical of the not-too-compelling measures I saw in Switzerland. I did not approve of them, especially because I was witnessing what looked like an uncontrollable growth in Covid-19 cases in Italy, and even the death of friends there. Nevertheless, I must admit that I experienced only one problem in Switzerland during the entire lockdown. It happened in one of the Yvonand supermarkets at the beginning of the pandemic, when despite documented cases of Covid-19 in the village distances were not respected.

For my children, however, the most serious problem was the inability to access common green areas, playgrounds and, above all, the common condominium spaces that were vital for meeting their friends.

Figure 4. Instructions on basic protection against the new Coronavirus graphically explained. Photo by the Author.

Distance School Education

The day after the suspension of school activities in the Canton, with embarrassing Swiss precision the local school was already well prepared. This shocked me as never before, especially as I contrasted the reaction-times of the Confederation with those in Italy. The school set up a distance service, with videos made by the teachers, daily lessons and a double-track homework-system that, improving more and more, would occupy the children for the weeks to

come. It was a mixture of videos, assignments and final assessments for all school subjects for the two classes; part of their school tasks involved online activities. However, equipping home spaces to accommodate the new practices dictated by the emergency meant transforming our children's rooms into playgrounds that had to function also as study-rooms. In other words, one had to try to alternate moments of leisure with school activities, with the problems associated with both my wife and I being involved daily in several hours of meetings and lessons and having to work simultaneously. The first problem was managing the time we could allow the children to access the computer on the desk.

Smart Working

My wife and I both fall into the smart working category, which allows one to overcome the problems created by the need for 'social distancing'. Here, technology played a key role because it allowed us to continue managing meetings and distance teaching. My university equipped itself with a web-portal creating virtual rooms to carry out lessons and exams, department and class meetings, doctoral councils and even student advising sessions. Obviously, this brought out several problems, starting with the management of the exams. This is a highly sensitive issue, particularly felt in the Italian University tradition based on oral exams. Despite being a reliable practice in face-to-face exams, this proved to be weak in the context of the new remote-exam model, especially because of the long time required for the exams to be carried out. To guarantee transparency, each exam requires the involvement of at least two commission members and three students.

In the private sector — for instance, in a multinational — the management of time and resources is linked to different objectives, starting with the use of working-time, including annual holidays. Therefore, my wife and I organized our home spaces to manage my wife's daily meetings (5 hours on average) and my lessons (4 hours on average). Meetings and lessons needed different spaces and could not overlap; moreover, given the limited space in the apartment, it was not always possible to isolate them from the voices of the children and their spatial needs.

A few weeks after the start of the lockdown, the Yverdon-les-Bains hospital was equipped to administer Covid-19 swabs through a drive-in test. However, while ensuring all basic activities, access to health services had been significantly limited (Figure 4). Once I had to go to the general practitioner due to a severe throat and mouth plaque inflammation caused by the increase in meetings, receptions and distance lessons. The appointment was fixed four days after my request.

Exit and Limitations

Having a garden, albeit small, allowed us to carry out outdoor activities, even those that did not take place in this season. We started eating out regularly for lunch and began to cultivate small garden spaces. In a few weeks the children turned the garden lawn into a desert; still, the need to guarantee some physical activity had to be managed, somehow. An appointment with a Youtube channel broadcasting HIIT online lessons was organized for each afternoon. Some

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neighbours who did not have a garden and were prevented by the regulation from using public spaces, gyms or the nature reserve, went to the Vaud or Jura hills.

We equipped ourselves for indoor sports. We bought a step for HIIT lessons online; then purchased online a ping-pong table. Over time, however, the children began to climb the plants next to our garden fence to look out: the fence divided the garden from the public road. The climbers managed to communicate with other children and agree on meeting-schedules on mobiles.

Like our neighbours, we tried to purchase food online, but for the first month this was practically impossible because deliveries were either not made due to high demand or, at best, were postponed by a month. So, we went shopping for food once a week. Nevertheless, online shopping went on for other goods; we repeatedly bought clothes, books for the children and what material they needed for homework — paper, ink refills (the latter difficult to find because its demand grew exponentially) and so on.

In addition to shopping at local supermarkets, other practices also had to change (composting, throwing out the garbage). Limits dictated by 'social distancing' were stringent from the beginning, even with neighbours — including, for instance, the family with whom we share the garden fence.

Loosening the Lockdown

The Confederation rules aimed at containing the spread of Covid-19 were never as stringent as those in Italy. The lockdown was partially lifted on 5 May, with the opening of some commercial activities, and then from 11 May, with the re-opening of schools. Schools instituted half-classes on alternate days and detailed hygiene and prevention measures. The opening of other activities (for instance, hairdressers) and Municipal buildings (albeit on appointment by e-mail) followed. New rules followed the loosening of restrictions, including the first explicit invitation to use facemasks when unable to guarantee distance.

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COVID-19 and Funeral-by-Zoom

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Introduction

Restrictions, lockdowns, self-isolations and quarantines enforced by various countries across the globe in order to prevent the spreading of COVID-19 have had a serious impact on many aspects of everyday life. More than ever people have realised the importance of human relations and solidarity, understanding and co-operation. Even the word love, however cautious we are to use it in a scientific article, has been often mentioned during these challenging times. Suddenly, although many new children were born, they could not be physically welcomed and cuddled by their closest relatives; university graduates could not enjoy the moment of their graduation with their parents and grandparents; adult children could not physically meet their elderly parents and celebrate their birthdays; friends, partners and couples were stuck in isolation in different locations; and many, many people could not participate in funerals of their — even closest — relatives and friends, which was one of the most painful and stressful experiences.

Numerous ceremonies and rituals with hundreds of years of uninterrupted tradition across the world had to be cancelled, postponed or changed as a consequence of the COVID-19 restrictions. These restrictions have differed in different countries, depending on their governmental decisions. Due to these decisions, we could see diverse responses to how people dealt with practising important rituals, primarily those associated with the life cycle — *rites de passage* (Van Gennep [1909] 1960).

In this short contribution, I focus on death and funeral rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic between March and June 2020. The pandemic has seriously challenged the question of death. Most countries that were hit by the pandemic introduced rules that prohibited relatives from visiting their loved ones in hospitals or in senior-care homes, and from seeing them after they died. Priests and other faith leaders could not pray and perform last rites at a dying person's bedside. Only a restricted number of people (or none) could attend the funeral. Most humans are afraid of dying alone, but during the pandemic many did die alone. And, although grieving practices are crucial for one's mental and spiritual health, many who lost their loved ones had to grieve alone, without a chance to show respect for the deceased in a traditional way.

People of various faiths had to find compromises and ways to replace traditional funeral rituals with new practices that were crucial in the process of burial and mourning in their religion. The present discussion is based on my observations from participating in a Jewish funeral by zoom. This brief ethnography has been inspired by a new, but very emotional experience.

Very Brief Theoretical Remarks

The rituals of death and funerals are as old as humankind. Although they vary across religions, cultures, ethnic groups and geographic regions, they also show some universal features: all

cultures and religions care for the deceased and show respect to them through a number of ritual practices. These practices cover the period before death, death itself, the after death, the funeral and the first burial (Pardo 1989: 117).

Excellent ethnographic works of the founding fathers of anthropology of death (Bronislaw Malinowski 1954, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown 2017, Robert Hertz 2017, Arnold van Gennep 1960 and Clifford Geertz 1974, to name just a few), who made significant contributions to the understanding of 'mortuary rituals, the emotions of grief and mouring, and the complexities of death and the afterworld' have been rethought and reconceptualised in the recent decades (Robben 2018: xv). The new anthropology of death does not look at the notion of death as a distinct biological and sociocultural phenomenon, but studies it together with life because 'the boundaries between them are considered to be porous, and liminality is understood more as a bridge between life and death than as a demarcated time frame' (Robben 2018: xviii). According to Pardo, 'there is a strong continuous interaction between tangible aspects of existence and symbolic, moral and spiritual ones and, most important, between body and soul and between the world of the living and that of the dead' (Pardo 1996: 11). In Pardo's research in Naples, Italy, the notion of 'a good death' emerged as a death that occurs when close relatives surround and care for the dying person, who does not refuse to acknowledge the coming death. A good death is a death accepted by both the dying and their relatives. It depends on such acceptance which then rests upon a fulfilled life and a quiet dying (Pardo 1989: 107).

Death is universally understood as a rite of passage, a transition to the other world (Pardo 1989), a journey to an ultimate destination or to the ancestral world (Saifur 2020). This transition that concerns both the body and the soul is effected through complex mortuary practices (Pardo 1996: 103); the deceased must be prepared by ritual washing, shaving and dressing. Rules vary with each religion and religious community and are taken very seriously. As Robert Hertz wrote: 'The body of the deceased is not regarded like the carcass of some animal: specific care must be given to it and a correct burial; not merely for reasons of hygiene, but out of moral obligation' ([1905–1906] 2017: 19). Any disruption in these long-term traditions can have serious consequences on the mental health of the community and of the relatives of the deceased.

In human history, only at time of war, genocide and pandemics death and funeral rituals have been seriously disrupted. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the first global challenge of this kind since World War 2. It has caused a large number of 'bad deaths', as dying people cound not be looked after by their relatives in the last hours of their life and passed away alone.

A Jewish Funeral-by-zoom

The focus of this ethnographic case study is a Jewish online funeral that took place in London, UK, in May 2020 during the pandemic. I had the privilege to participate in the funeral of my friend's mother and in the following evening ceremony — the beginning of Shiva; that is, the week-long mouring period for the relatives. In order to explain the extraordinarity of an online ceremony of such importance, I will first outline the key points of a Jewish funeral.

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A Jewish funeral — like funerals in other old religions — has its own rituals with a tradition of hundreds of years. Its main part is a burial that should take place within 24 hours after death, or as soon as possible (similar to Islam). However, because of a broad variety of Jewish religious movements (such as the ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist), the details of practice vary according to each Jewish community and its denomination.

In all Jewish communities the preparation of the body for the funeral is the responsibility of a burial society, the chevra kadisha. Members of the society are volunteers who take care of all major steps in order to keep tradition and rules (washing, ritual purification and dressing in a cloth shroud) and show respect to the deceased. The funeral service usually takes place at the cemetery. After the service, the mourners move to the grave and symbolically fill it (usually using a shovel), which is considered a good mitzvah, an act of human kindness and a religious duty.

In my case-study, due to the fact that the deceased, the beloved mother of my friend, was an elderly lady and a victim of the coronavirus, only the funeral service people could be physically present at the funeral. The closest relatives had to find a compromise between the religious rules and governmental COVID-19 rules, which were introduced for entirely good reasons. Still, the decision was not easy for them.

The whole funeral service was then organised via the zoom application. As the son of the deceased said:

> '[...] then it is about how you manage what's left [...] what agency you have. Doing the funeral in that way allowed us, as you saw, to do and say things and hear from others in a way which was meaningful for us and for the other mourners. And we think mum would have approved. It also meant that there was no question about us being able to be with Dad to try to support him'.

The closest family, the Reform female Rabbi and relatives and friends took part in the funeral virtually. The funeral prayer-book was offered to all participants online and put on screen during the service. This was the second online experience of this type within a week for the Rabbi leading the service. In spite of its unusual form, the ceremony was very emotional and decent. The online participation in the funeral was about three-times higher than the closest family expected. Friends and relatives from all over the world who would otherwise be unable to attend due to various reasons (illness, distance, finances, and so on) took part in the ceremony and had a place 'in the first row' (thanks to zoom). The funeral-by-zoom offered an opportunity to present visually the life of the deceased with all her important achievements and milestones also to distant relatives or friends who did not know her very well. The ceremony was a celebration of her life, which many people could share and enjoy. I am not sure whether the real ceremony would have achieved as much as the online one — at least not in the same way.

Several hours later, the e-Shiva started. The Shiva is a mourning period of seven days that follows the burial. The closest relatives (parents, spouses, children and siblings) are supposed to follow certain requirements during this period (they stay at home, pray, wear torn clothes as an expression of grief and follow several other rules). The first evening of the Shiva takes place

after the funeral; it is usually when all relatives and friends visit the home of a mourner (the Shiva house). This is an opportunity to express grief for loss and sorrow, and share memories. During this evening, Kaddish — a hymn of the magnification and sanctification of God's name — is recited.

The e-Shiva-by-zoom I participated in started on the evening after the funeral. The son of the deceased welcomed several participants from all over the world. Then, the Rabbi took over and recited the Kaddish together with all relatives and friends (the texts online made it possible for everyone to follow). The usual Shiva customs (washing hands, litting candles, covering mirrors, serving meals of condolences traditionally offered by neighbours or friends) took place within each family that participated in the e-Shiva. After the official part of the ceremony, most participants did not leave and wanted to share their memories of the deceased. Everyone wanted to say something nice and personal. In spite of Shiva ceremony being a virtual zoom meeting, the experience was very personal, emotional, even intimate — perhaps because one could see closely the faces and homes of all participants. Every contribution to the online exchange ended with a usual Jewish wish: 'We wish you a long life'. It was an unforgettable experience and, despite the virtual form of the funeral and the Shiva, the whole ceremony was decent and very respectful to the deceased.

Final Remarks

In this short case study based on my personal experience I have tried to demonstrate how a traditional Jewish funeral in a Reform Jewish community in the UK had to accomodate to governmental restrictions.[1] Of course, face-to-face human contact can be hardly replaced. However, we live in times of globalisation when many extended families live all over the world, and in case of the death of a relative not all family members can manage to participate in the funeral within 24 hours (in the case of Jewish and Muslim families). The pandemic experience of funerals-by-zoom has demonstrated that the future of funerals might include zooming, streaming or other online forms for those who cannot participate physically but still want to be involved.

In the whole history of mankind, rituals, rites de passage, customs and ceremonies have been crucial in people's lives. They present the certainty of our existence. Whatever happens, rituals, customs and ceremonies will remain — their form may change, but they will always be here in order to protect continuity, solidarity, collaboration, understanding and love. Let us hope that the corona-crisis will teach us this important lesson and help strengthen humanity across the globe.

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COVID-19: Full Teleworking in Greece

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Recent approaches to social cohesion suggest that solidarity in late modernity can be understood either as having various forms or as being an issue of recognition. Solidarity can take three forms: affective, conventional and reflective. Affective solidarity concerns traditional societies and is based on close relations through which the common 'we' that is created excludes strangers for whom there are no strong feelings. Conventional solidarity is based on common interests and concerns the values which unite a group through joint struggles or efforts; if people want to be members of the group, they have to subject themselves to its norms. Reflective solidarity is defined as a mutual expectation of responsible orientation to relationships, which is obtained through communication. Jodi Dean (1995) thinks that we are moving further away from the first two towards the latter, where reflexivity prevails. Dean's concept of reflective solidarity complements Honneth's theory of solidarity (1996), where recognition is seen as the general prerequisite for the development of a socially well-functioning identity and hence for people's possibilities for self-realization and social integration.

In line with Pardo's discussion of self-worth (1996), mutual recognition is the precondition for a successful relation to oneself and it can be expressed, a) as developing a positive relation to oneself through the certainty of the continuity of affective ties; b) as recognizing legally the citizen as an equal member of the community of rights which is a precondition for the development of self-respect; and, c) as recognition of the ethical person who is the bearer of specific qualities. Given that the nature of people's jobs and of their working experiences permeate the abovementioned prerequisites for attaining solidarity and self-respect in modern societies, it seems that the recent pandemic of COVID-19 undermines the prospects of social cohesion and puts in jeopardy its preconditions. In this light, individual responsibility through social distancing has emerged as the main, necessary therapeutic means for coping with pandemic's spread. This kind of biopolitical technology has an intrinsic spatial aspect: the more one is distanced the better for him/her. Space, thus, is medicalised and along with it, all aspects of social life. Thus, reflective solidarity takes the form of an ethical dilemma in Butler's (2015) terms: Am I responsible for what happens in society to the extent that I am far away from it or, due to its closeness, I cannot help assume the responsibility for it? An important dimension of this condition is the symbolic and actual ordering of people's bodies.

The COVID-19 crisis showed vividly that before anything else what is at stake is the protection of human bodies, which are probably on the verge of becoming fragile and vulnerable if social distancing is not followed. In this connection, teleworking emerges as the epiphenomenon of the current health crisis, as it orders bodies in tele-places giving the impression that society keeps working and that a new digital solidarity is forming. Yet, teleworking is another form of social distancing which in the majority of cases creates fear,

stress and vulnerability to the extent that no one can really know whose working career is worth continuing and whose is not. Hence, teleworking as a means of biopower manages the existing inequalities in the labour market through the unequal distribution of vulnerability in society. In other words, who is next for entering this *terra incognita* in terms of legislation, application, survival and working future?

My experience from teleworking in the University is that, depending on the context, this is a highly problematic process. No sociality is developed, teaching gets an instrumental character, there is no essential mentoring, the notion of working time is blurred with that of personal time, time is annihilated by space becoming more relentless and questions arise, such as: what if, in the near future, my job would be done by a talking machine or a Youtube video, instead of an academic teacher? Of course, talking machines cannot do research but who really cares in the age of medicalised social relations? In addition, I was thinking that (so far) my job was, in a way, well protected but what about other workers, who are no longer considered to have privileged employment (bank employees, service workers etc)? The imperative of implementing teleworking because of COVID-19 pandemic into all kinds of jobs in both the public and the private sectors rapidly transforms people's working experiences in various respects. The two defining features of teleworking are: a) remoteness from office, meaning that the home becomes the location of this type of work; and, b) the inclusion of information technologies as crucial to teleworkers performing their work.

While some researchers regard teleworkers as necessarily working from home, others agree that telework can include work in a variety of locations as long as it is remote from the client or the employer (Sullivan 2003). It has been suggested that teleworking is a knowledge-oriented task and that teleworkers are knowledge workers who work with intangibles. As for the impact of teleworking on workers' life, studies that demonstrate positive outcomes from telework, such as improved work-life balance for employees and reduced costs for organizations (Kanellopoulos 2011), are contrasted by other studies demonstrating potentially negative outcomes, such as difficulties in developing shared knowledge among employees and reduced work satisfaction (Pyöriä 2011).

On the one hand, it is argued that teleworking gives people access to a better balance of work and home life; by spending less time away from home, can use spend more time with their family, choose their work hours and manage their own time. Additionally, organizations take advantage of a labour market of skilled personnel who are not necessarily able to work full time from a conventional office environment such as the disabled. Thus, productivity is increased because workers are highly motivated to prove that their teleworking is successful.

On the other hand, relevant research has highlighted many problems related to teleworking. Social isolation is the most frequently cited disadvantage because the opportunity of crafting bonds and comparing with others co-workers for self-improvement is lost. In addition, workers are pushed to work even if they are ill. More generally, they are pushed to be present regardless of the difficulties that they experience, a phenomenon which has been called 'presentism'. Often, the quality of work is negatively impacted because teleworkers are not

offered the necessary technical support. Another issue concerns the undermining of work networks and job culture through which workers obtain information for career advancement or for trade-union participation. Finally, there is a blurring of boundaries between work and home life.

As the importance of the benefits and the disadvantages of teleworking concerns both private and public sectors, the challenge for Greek society is whether telework leads to greater professional isolation and less organizational commitment and how it affects employees' precariousness levels (Spyridakis 2013). A final challenge has to do with the ageing of the workforce population. To the extent that the labour market cannot accommodate elder workers into teleworking, there might well be increased financial pressure on a shrinking share of younger workers to fund the retirement and health care of a growing nonworking older population (Friedberg 2000, Richard and Steuerle 2004). This could also translate into labour and skill shortages for many industries and organizations. Retaining older workers reaching retirement age is to the employers' benefit, for these workers are highly knowledgeable and skilled and embody desirable work-related attributes such as maturity and dependability. The opportunity to telework, especially from home, can offer an added incentive for many older workers to delay retirement or re-enter the workforce. At the same time, employers could tap into this expanded labour pool without having to meet the costs associated with office space and commuting. However, there are a number of considerations that need to be addressed to maximize this opportunity for older people, including the technological demands of telework jobs, the technology skills required and managers' attitudes toward telework and older workers.

To sum up, the challenges posed by the current pandemic concern the way people are going to deal with the transformation of work into teleworking, the way this transformation is going to impact upon workers' social identity and the way in which the sense of self-respect and recognition is going to affect the determinants of social solidarity in Greek society.

For now, the application of teleworking comes from the demand side of the labour market. However, research conducted during the COVID-19 crisis showed that employers are willing to go on with this form of work even after the pandemic, thus changing labour and organization models in the production process. Six out of 10 companies stated that in the post-COVID-19 era and in view of the new model of distance working they will update the performance measurement systems of their employees with special emphasis on Key Performance Indicators. The pandemic also seems to have serious effects on labour organization, which combines with the new skills companies demand from employees, such as the ability to work without supervision (67.16%); the orientation to the results (49.25%); the ability to cooperate (47.7%); the ability to communicate (38.81%); and the ability to deal with information management (28.36%). Finally, these new processes in the labour market have generated a new form of leadership. According to People for Business (2020), the 'leader' of the digital age must have the following characteristics: change management (57.14%); empathy (49.21%); strategic thinking (42.86%); digital skills (39.68%); resilience (36.51%); decision making and crisis management (28.57%) and innovation and creativity (26.98%).

All this happens in a context where the sudden cessation of economic activity has caused an unprecedented recession both internationally and domestically, which must be read in the context of the Greek economy having experienced a ten-year very cruel Memoranda period. The Greek GDP decreased in the fourth quarter of 2019 by 0.7%, compared to the third quarter of the same year. The GDP showed the largest decrease in exports and imports of goods and services (Vatikiotis 2020). Moreover, according to the OECD's rough estimates, the recession in 2020 will approach 10%, while growth will be significantly lower for 2021 (specifically, 2.3%); employment will fall by 3.8% this year and by 1.8% in 2021; unemployment will rise from 19.6% in 2020 to 20.4% in 2021; and the debt will exceed 200% in 2020.

The COVID-19 period is not simply a state of emergency one. In my view, it is a great opportunity for the complete and radical re-organisation of labour and for the re-framing of working rights from the demand side of the labour market. Teleworking is only one aspect of the neoliberal wish for labour costs and wages reduction in the name of the common good at a time when public intervention and labour friendly policies are badly needed. To avoid social disruption and more vulnerability we must understand the needs and the lived experiences of how workers deal with the teleworking reality and the management of their precariousness in general (Pardo 1996). Effective policy measures can be implemented in a way that meet the situational demands. Thus, workers' sense of self-respect will be empowered, and the prospects of social solidarity will be better grounded. In this sense, public intervention is necessary: in the context of this state of emergency, the labour market partners can be better informed and negotiate good labour relations; best practices adopted during the health crisis can be adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups; unemployment and social exclusion can be managed in the long term to the extent that teleworking may create new employment positions; a sizeable portion of nay financial assistance can be directed towards the empowerment of workers who are on the verge of losing their job. The future is near, we will see.

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A New Life Beyond the Screen(s): My COVID-19 Re-Evolution

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It was the morning of 12 March 2020 — my birthday, 43 years of a 'normal' life. Our director summoned all the employees to the courtyard and briefly explained that we had to leave our offices immediately due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed by our national and local governments.

Just a few days earlier, the same reason had forced me to postpone to unknown date an important educational event involving more than 100 registered teachers, an event I had been organizing for weeks.

Many of us already knew that during the previous days, other colleagues and professors were also forced to leave their activities and go into quarantine, because other colleagues or family members could be possible sources of contagion.

On 9 March, an astonished and unprepared Nation had started to experience a new life, floundering amongst sudden personal and public limitations, fear, contradictory information, health emergency, death. All at once.

Suddenly the whole of Sicily, my town, me, too, had to face rules and impositions, spelling very different living — and working — standards; for most people, hard to accept and interiorize as 'the current standards'.

Fear spread everywhere. People in my town started to struggle with a number of strict limitations imposed by the Mayor, including a daily curfew at 6 pm and long lines to enter, one at a time, empty grocery stores. Ambulances with sirens blaring crossed the town night and day and police cars were the only vehicles on the street.

Figure 1. Army patrol during lockdown in Messina. Photo by the Author.

My ten-year relationship had roughly been broken by my partner just a few days before the lockdown started, leaving me completely alone in dealing with my own fear and

commitments. Forced to stay in my empty flat, I watched this strange Spring beginning. It was still rainy and cold, but the sea was unusually quiet. Sea traffic was suspended, too, maintaining just a couple of ferries a day to guarantee emergency services and commuters crossings to and from Calabria. The directors agreed that our University could not stop just then. It was to be an anchor for the entire community, while the world around was experiencing such an earthquake. We were informed that we would continue working at home for an undefined time — depending on the evolution of the virus. Our ICT specialists quickly developed and shared systems to connect us to each other, with students, professors and external users, by web or phone; teaching and examinations — even graduations! — were to be held by web only.

My personal computer and phone quickly became a sort of appendage; my living room became my new 'always open' office, with my three cats feeling scared and confused by all those ringtones and disembodied voices.

While we were just trying to understand how to re-organize our work through new software and applications, we also quickly began to understand that our usual customers and stakeholders, too, were experiencing something new, often acting or reacting with an unusual aggressiveness.

Even if my standard customers are usually defined as 'qualified' (school teachers, university students, public officials), and I am certainly not a computer specialist, I quickly realized that most of them had many problems in using the most common technologies or managing a 'professional' relationship through them. My daily work started to become harder than ever, as the days passed and the whole situation seemed to get worse — especially from the economic point of view, due to the general closure of businesses and job stop and loss for most people.

During the first days, I was the only one of my team with an available 'virtual phone number' for our customers. I received thousands of calls every day, till late afternoon. My head kept telling me 'You have to be kinder than before, Monica. People are scared and confused, keep calm even if they are aggressive. You can't know what's happening to them at this moment […]; so, be kind. And helpful. Right now, the right word can do a lot.' And so, maybe for the first time, I started practicing empathy. At the same time, I was facing abandonment, loneliness and a sense of emptiness — and lots of everyday practical problems, too, caused by the restrictions in my town. Still, I learned to measure my voice, my reactions, my emotions, while at the other end people talked about their personal issues, more than about objective difficulties with a specific procedure to be followed. I could describe thousands of peculiar calls and e-mails I received and answered during those days — always reacting as if I was living in a different time, in a different world, where any matter could be easily solved by a couple of clicks on my pc and a few encouraging words.

One day, all members of my organizational unit received a really weird e-mail, written in capital letters. It read: '*E' urgente parlarvi e non comunico bene tramite email, per favore potete telefonarmi: é importante. Il mio numero é … Grazie. Mi chiamo … e sono di Reggio*

Calabria' (I need to speak urgently to you and I'm not so capable of communicating by e-mail, can you please call me? It's important. My phone number is … Thank you. My name is … and I'm from Reggio Calabria).

Our first reaction was — understandably, I suppose — equally weird. Our work concerns higher education and continuing education, and is mostly related to people with university degrees and highly specialized people, so we could never have imagined that, in 2020, when almost every aspect of our lives is computer-based, someone involved in public education would be unable to write and send a 'normal' e-mail. However, after minutes of giggling in our video-chat (one of the means we were using daily to talk to each other and our colleagues), our director invited us to reflect on this fact as a sad picture of the general state of the public schools in our country and especially here, in the South, where economic and social difficulties affect every kind of public and private issues. In public education, teachers and prospective teachers — at any level, as we experience daily in our work — often suffer from the digital divide; and, unfortunately, not only that. Anyway, someone had to answer the lady. And just because I was still the only one in my unit with a working web phone it fell to me.

The lady answered with a mix of surprise and emotion. She had not really expected a call from us. She started crying: it was the first time she had used the e-mail system, she explained with a thousand thanks. She was totally unaware of basic ICT and was sure no one would answer, finding her stupid and out of touch. In the past, her son managed all her 'digital' life but, due to lockdown, he was locked in another town and could help her only by giving instructions by phone. Her 'problem' was solved in a couple of minutes. But I took about one hour to reassure her and explain how to send and answer an e-mail autonomously and check information on our institutional web pages. Once again, at the end of that call, I was surprised by my own patience and way of interacting. I was really becoming a different me. Even my colleagues noticed it. I started to receive daily personal message of thanks from our clients. It was strange to me, but good.

And so, by the end of March, many things and habits — and relationships at any level, including my working routine and personal life — had drastically changed, maybe forever.

It is the end of June now. Lockdown has finished, many restrictions have ceased, our lives are resuming their normal course day by day; even if we are still partially working from home; even if we have to be booked in advance in order to be physically present in the office — twice a week, must put on protective face masks every time we get there and must avoid contact with other colleagues and clients. The emergency is not finished and — they say — it could restart in the coming months.

When I am home, I still see the same sea from my windows. Sometimes, I hear children playing in the neighbouring courtyards, and people strolling by on the Riviera. Sometimes, I still hear sirens blaring. But now, beyond my screen(s), there is a different world and a different life. There is a different me.

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Life in a time of COVID — 30 July 2020

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In 1985 the Colombian novelist, Gabriel Garcia Marquez published *Love in a Time of Cholera*. It reminds us that love and loss are constants in life. Consistent with the magic realism of which Marquez has been a master the novel follows a complex portrayal of love, abandonment and reconciliation despite all that surrounds the characters of the novel. I cannot write with Marquez's ethereal quality but I do know that epidemics and pandemics are life changing. Like total war in the twentieth century which acted as a midwife of change and upheaval, the Russian Revolutions, the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire- so the COVID pandemic has challenged political order and questioned the truthfulness, competence and general credibility of political leaders: Johnson in the UK; Trump in the USA; and Bolsonaro in Brazil. Will we be grateful for COVID? Will it prick the populist bubble?

The collision of the COVID pandemic with other festering ills — black lives matter perhaps the most prominent example — has galvanised political protest on a global scale. There are also so many unknowns particularly in authoritarian states like Russia, North Korea and China. It is certain though that current trends towards insular nationalism — the UK's departure from the European Union, for example — progress at an arthritic pace. Boris Johnson's resort to Churchill rhetoric invoking war time exhortations is remarkably vapid. The belief that heroic language will keep citizens onside in this scenario does not conceal state failure: slowness to act; the lack of action in respect of care homes for the aged frail; the mismanagement of education.

Keeping Life Going

I am fortunate. I live in a rural location in east Leicestershire, some 12 miles from the city of Leicester. According to the *Office for National Statistics* there are no COVID deaths in the area where I live. Eleven miles away ONS has reported 51 deaths in the City. That is not too far away. I use ONS statistics for my research and because I have retired from full-time employment. I was already in contact with ONS for a lifestyle questionnaire: Do I own my house? Do I have any part-time employment? Are you over seventy years of age? My answers to these questions over a year ago mean that I am on the ONS list. So, it was no surprise that when the telephone rang I should be asked by a volunteer ONS agent whether I would be prepared to participate in the in COVID testing regime. I volunteered and also volunteered my wife. She agreed. Our sense of civic responsibility told us that we should participate. We were visited every week by a string of volunteers — nurses, pharmacists and students. Here we were then, the good citizens agreeing to have throat and nose swabs in our front garden, observing social distancing and gingerly returning our swab sticks in a sealed bag, duly photographed by

a smart phone and then, apparently, rushed to a laboratory in Birmingham. Why not Leicester? The volunteer swab taker did not know.

Society was being mobilised and we listen to the briefings on the BBC World News Channel. The formal dramatization of the display the engine of the state was working. Or was it? Nicola Sturgeon, the first minister for Scotland, seems to have a different plan. Mark Drakeford, for Wales is toeing the line. We marvel at the experts. Their authority is needed to prop-up the waffling Johnson and the graphs are slick too.

After this initial view of the government's efforts we concluded that the government had acted with due haste even though the journalists were asking awkward questions. Robert Peston's exaggerated pronunciation and his questions throw a spanner in the works. Then, Laura Kuensberg, of the BBC, starts to get stuck-in and ready to skewer Johnson. The PM had surely been dreading this moment? Her stern authority and politeness cause Johnson to flap like a seal stranded on a beach. The government had been too slow to respond to the emergency. Let's have supper and a glass of wine. We make our way to the kitchen.

After this initial grandstand view of the state of the nation we begin to think how we might cope with the social isolation. We learn how to queue to shop. No ration books, as was the case in World War 2 and its aftermath. No petrol coupons, as at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956. We walk. We join a quiz night with friends using *What'sApp*. But then real life kicks in. My mother-in-law, Betty, has fallen in the bathroom. She is 94 years of age and has gashed her head. She has used her pendant necklace alarm. We drive for 20 minutes. We arrive. Paramedics are already with her. Thank goodness for the pendant alarm. The paramedics recommend that she is taken to hospital. We have been here before, many times but not in the time of COVID. Will it be safe? Will Betty be safe? We make our way to the Leicester Royal Infirmary. We sanitise our hands. Is COVID more dangerous than MRSA? I wonder, anxiously. Betty has recovered. My wife negotiates her mother's release from the hospital. We bring her home. Thoughts about COVID recede but only temporarily.

The experience of COVID goes on and I begin to consider COVID's transformative power. Rather like total war in the twentieth century which required the mobilisation of whole societies, pandemics have a peculiar ratchet effect. The tests that society faced in 1914-18 and 1939-45 were immense. The tests transformed British society; the Union of the 4 nations was probably stronger than it had ever been. I knew that my parents had survived the war. Indeed, if it had not been for the Blitz of the Clyde in 1941 my mother and father would not have met and I would not be who I am!

Reflections

I look around to see what COVID might be comparable to. The so-called Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-21 came to mind. I knew this because of family collective memory. I had an uncle born in 1918: both his parents died in the epidemic and my uncle and his sister were adopted but by different parents to be parted until they were united again in 1998. Will COVID wreak such havoc? I then start to scour my book collection and light upon a reference to the

Russian flu of 1889-92. What was this? I had taught history for 36 years but I had not encountered the Russian flu. There was a certain menace about the term. I was aware of a different rumour in early 1915 that Russian troops had allegedly landed in northern Scotland and were marching, 'with snow on their boots' south to London and then on to the Western Front. Mass mobilisation creates its rumour mill grinding out a societal hysteria? The Russian flu of 1889-92 had carried off the Duke of Clarence and Avondale, the grandson of Queen Victoria. That the flu had taken a member of the Royal Family was alarming. Was anybody safe? The worst affected city was Sheffield: 'a considerable number of persons have been attacked, amongst them several medical men' (*Sheffield Morning Post*, 13 April 1891). The so-called Russian Flu had originated in central Asia affecting Bokhara and making its way west and arriving in Sheffield via the port of Hull. The Russian flu was regarded with fear and indeed some hysteria. So, COVID began apparently in the Chinese city of Wuhan and then spread to Europe and beyond.

Sunday 29 March

It's the beginning of summer? The clocks go forward one hour registering BST but the COVID lockdown hangs over us. I drive 5 miles to my Mother-in-law's flat. I am just checking that she is OK but I have to reset her large font electronic clock and reset the time in line with BST but she does know it is Sunday and she seems happy but does not appreciate the danger of COVID or the huge effect that it will have on her life: no community bus service into Leicester; the end of old people's lunches at the local church; and the end of the keep-fit exercise group. Since the death of her husband, Dennis, she longs to go out and socialise and have a natter with the new circle of friends that she has made. I think this will be hard.

Sunday 5 April 2020

I go to my mother-in-law (Betty). She is so pleased to see me and wants to get out for a walk and some fresh air. We walk around the Nether hall Housing estate, built in the early 1950s by Leicester City Council. At the time, it was a haven for the post-war families to move out of the city, near green fields. Now, the estate is run-down except for those whose houses that are now owner occupied since the Thatcher revolution of the 1980s. What were formerly front gardens are now standing spaces for cars. The optimism of those post-war years can still be seen; a stream, a brook runs down the centre of a grassed area and a pedestrian footbridge is still intact although the stream itself is scattered with the usual detritus of the now — plastic bottles, beer cans. What ever happened to the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign? Betty kept going but by the time we returned to her flat she was tired. 'Do you want a cup of tea? Do you want a biscuit?' I agree to both.

28 June 2020 — Hopes Dashed

The R number is coming down. The government is easing the lockdown but plans to manage an orderly phased departure from lockdown take a jolt. *The Sunday Times* reports the possibility of a spike in COVID infections in Leicester. The picture is not clear but it is claimed that the

outbreak is located in the North Evington district on the east side of the city. It is essentially an area of immigration — both long- and shorter-term — dating back to at least the Uganda Asian crisis of the 1970s which prompted one of the great waves of post-colonial migrations following Idi Amin's coup. Since that time, Leicester has become a significant destination for migrants from multiple departure points around the globe; and, because of its largely harmonious race relations, it was designated Home Office city for asylum seekers and refugees from Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia. This is a major setback for a city that has prided itself as a multicultural city. Elsewhere — London, Manchester and Liverpool — post-lockdown pressures have spilled out to street riots in Brixton, Maida Vale and elsewhere. The Leicester case is alarming and news coverage on BBC East Midlands Today is quick to capture a local story that is nationally significant. The lockdown spreads ire and it is cast in a subliminal racist manner. The extension of the lockdown area to suburban Oadby and Wigston has lit the touch paper. It prompts a sense of indignation with the people of Oadby feeling a sense of stigma that they have been bracketed with immigrants in the city.

Leicester's elected Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, expressed concern in radio interviews that should the city be faced with an extension of lockdown restrictions for the city when the rest of the country was essentially moving out of those restrictions carried certain dangers of civil unrest. He has requested further information from the government, apparently slow in forthcoming, before any local lockdown is applied. The Secretary of State for Health has the power to do so under the 1985 Public Health act. The extension of the lockdown in Leicester takes on a new strand when the *Sunday Times* runs a story when an 'undercover' reporter gains access to a number of clothing textile factories to expose sweat shop conditions — £3.50 per hour — for employees producing garments for the fashion chain Boohoo. There is to be an inquiry. Lockdown continues. Sir Peter says that the government is intent 'on making an example of us' (BBC East Midlands Today).

What else will COVID bring? A colleague in the School of History sends out an email suggesting that the University should carry out research on stories of migration. She is in luck the East Midlands Oral History Archive EMOHA is housed in the University. There is a flurry of replies. I feel a research application coming on.

Postscript

A recent commentator has suggested that it may well take 65 years to recover from the COVID pandemic. It probably took around 30-40 years to recover from the effects of the two world wars in the twentieth century. The prospects of the post-1945 generation (baby boomers) is often seen optimistically despite rationing and Britain's debts to the USA. Then, Britain had a safety valve of Empire and government was able to encourage emigration to the settler nations of the Commonwealth — Canada, South Africa, Rhodesia, New Zealand and of course Australia. What are the opportunities for our children and our grandchildren? We have two granddaughters who are about to start university this autumn and we have a queue of younger grandchildren who should be going back to school in September. What are their prospects? Will

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they emigrate? But where to go? The nation is already heavily burdened as a consequence of the 2008 crash and although the government is pumping money into the economy there is no guarantee of 'sun lit uplands'. Rather, there will be winners and losers. What kind of world will they inherit?

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Life in the Time of Covid-19 in a Hyper-Super-Gentrified Neighbourhood

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The Covid19 pandemic provided an opportunity to look more closely at microsocial life in my 'super', and 'hyper-gentrified' neighbourhood. These value-laden terms have negative connotations for inhabitants of such privileged, ironically, stigmatized places. More importantly, the labels are of little value for ethnographers. This multi-modal autoethnographic essay explores daily life on one face-block in Park Slope, Brooklyn between the New York State Phase 1 lockdown on March 20, and the start of Phase 2 on June 22.

Introduction

Gentrification's history remains closely tied to the process defined by Ruth Glass (1964). Since then it has been described progressively grander prefixes: Super (Lees 2003); Hyper (Shaw 2008); and Planetary (Lees et al 2016). They fall under two general types: Political Economic following Neil Smith (1979), and Cultural Consumption following David Ley (1996).

Literature on Gentrification describes it as destroying nostalgic urban neighbourhoods, and replacing them with individualism and consumerism. Gentrifiers are viewed as (neo)colonizers, appropriating working and lower-middle-class lifestyles (de Oliver 2016). John Joe Schlichtman and Jason Patch (2014) explored their own 'culpability' as gentrifiers. Schlichtman lived in Park Slope, and provided a description that would be unrecognizable to many residents, as most studies focus on sections where displacement was most likely to occur such as poor and working-class areas (Slater 2003, Halasz 2018).

Methods Review

As an antidote to the prejudgment, Michael Borer (2019) employs the rubric of 'scenes' to describe Las Vegas and compare how it is perceived by tourists as opposed to how it is lived by residents. Following Clifford Geertz's advice, he immersed himself in the ordinary acts of locals and produced descriptions that reveal the 'normalness' of people's culture without reducing its 'particularity' (Geertz 1973: 14). Borer described a scene as '[…] an expressive entity, and claims about it come in verbal, textual, visual, and behavioral forms' (Borer 2019: 247).

For this article, I gathered Visual and Digital data (Krase 2018). Donna Schwartz suggested that the simplest and least ideological Visual Ethnography is best fitted to the research scene and most useful for humanist sensibilities (1989: 152). Autoethnography describes and systematically analyses personal experience to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al 2011: §1). As noted by Domínguez et al., digital ethnography, ethnography through the Internet, 'maintains its own dialogue with the established tradition of ethnography and formulates its relation to this tradition in different ways' (2007: 1).

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Observations

I have lived on 9th Street since 1985 when I bought a two-family home during one of the periodic surges in housing prices in a 'hot' real estate market. Since then, prices have risen and fallen drastically several times. I have seen little if any forced 'displacement' here, as most homes are sold on after the death of an elderly owner, and heirs sought the best price. There have also been a number of resales between one another loosely-defined 'gentrifier'. In recent years, a few, very wealthy buyers, have paid for costly renovations. The socioeconomic profile of 9th Street residents, drawn from Community Survey Census Tract 167, fit the general pattern of much higher than average education, income, occupation, as outlined by Halasz and other demographic studies of gentrification in Brooklyn (2018).

Virtual Observations

Because people have been reluctant to meet face-to-face during this health crisis, social media has increased in importance for communication. What was said 'over the fence' is now said via social media. Previously, if there was a problem such as a noisy party, interaction would be direct, such as knocking on a neighbour's door. Now, passing the word by old-fashioned 'telephone tree' calls has been replaced by electronic media. Although the 9th Street Google Group was created before the crisis, it is used more often now, and COVID-19 related topics are frequent.

Observation 1

During the COVID-19 crisis, people have been encouraged to thank 'essential workers'. One of the ways that this takes place in New York City is that every day at 7 PM residents from more than a dozen buildings make loud noises. Below is a facsimile of the messages ending the practice at the start of Phase 2 of the lockdown with a message about Black Lives Matter activities.

> Subject: Re: NYers Plan 'Outdoor Moment' Protest For Minutes After 8pm Curfew |New York City, NY Patch Date: Thu, 4 Jun 2020, at 9:01 am
> 'Only a few people out last night. perhaps protest fatigue as are out at 7 pm making lots of righteous noise. we'll be out again tonight at 8 for a few minutes to show solidarity. last night I sang one verse of "we shall overcome", which was fantastic!
> On 2 Jun 2020, at 6:52 PM, XXXX wrote:
> 'Thanks - let's use that 7pm clap energy to promote some change.'
> On Tue, 2 Jun 2020, at 6:32 PM. Sent: Wed, 3 Jun 2020, at 8:36 pm:
> 'We fully support the protests against police brutality and the curfew. Would it possible for the 8pm event to be something quieter than banging pots and pans? Perhaps singing as previously suggested or kneeling? As a family with a young kid and a baby, we have built our schedule with the understanding that 7pm is a sleepless time. As the evenings warm up and windows remain open, it will be difficult to schedule naps and bedtime around TWO noisy daily events. Thoughts? Sent remotely, from XXXX'

> On 3 Jun 2020, at 12:58 PM, So and so wrote:
> 'We'll join in, and I can tell our roof-top neighbors (who are on PPW), and try to get them to join [...] Rain or shine, or is there a rain-date? XXXX'

Observation 2

Because of the lockdown of many stores during the crisis, residents have been ordering more items to be delivered to their homes. The traffic in parcels is so great that they are often left at the doorstep. In several cases they have been misdelivered and notice given, or in this case packages were stolen, and the 9thStreet Google Group has provided suggestions.

> On 4 Jun 2020, at 5:14 AM XXXX wrote:
> 'Hi – we're on 9th between 7th/8th. Yesterday, one of our neighbors chased a woman down the block after observing her taking a package from their front area. She was carrying two large shopping bags of packages. Our neighbor demanded her package back (she gave it to her), and then the woman ran toward 7th Ave. Our neighbor described her as 50's/60's, Caucasian, with long black hair.'
> On Thu, 4 Jun 2020, at 7:29 AM XXXX wrote:
> 'I found two empty packages left on my table ripped open and empty. Seems unlikely the wind blew them onto my table. I'm sharing in case these houses were waiting for a package and it was stolen. XXXX @ XXX and XXXX @ XXX'

Observation 3

Most of the 9th Street Google Group messages concerned street noise, things for sale, looking for apartments to rent, and security. A few were celebratory such as this about celebrating a birthday of a long-time resident.

> On Sat, 9 May 2020, at 7:37 PM XXXX wrote:
> 'Hi XX, you may have gotten So and so daughter's flyer re: singing Happy Birthday to her father on Tuesday 5-12 at the time block comes out to cheer first responders. It's his 70th. She asked me to pass info around to those she may not know. It's also 1st Mother's Day without her mom. I sent her a message I read from block ass email but not sure if it was correct. If u have correct email send to me or her. I hope you and XXXX and all your family are well. Not even sure if you are home. So many in PS have homes away from city they have fled to! Stay safe. Kind regards, XXXX. Sent from my iPhone'.

Visual Observations

For at least a month, many block residents stood outside on their front stoops or yards, or on roofs at 7 PM, to join thousands of other New Yorkers to thank essential workers for their sacrifices in service to the city as a whole. Most banged on pots and pans; others made noises as loud as they could with bells or other, more or less, musical instruments. The festive noise-making lasted about five minutes, but was sometimes extended so they could greet the MTA Bus which passed by the street about that time. The appreciative bus driver would honk his horn all the way up the block in response.

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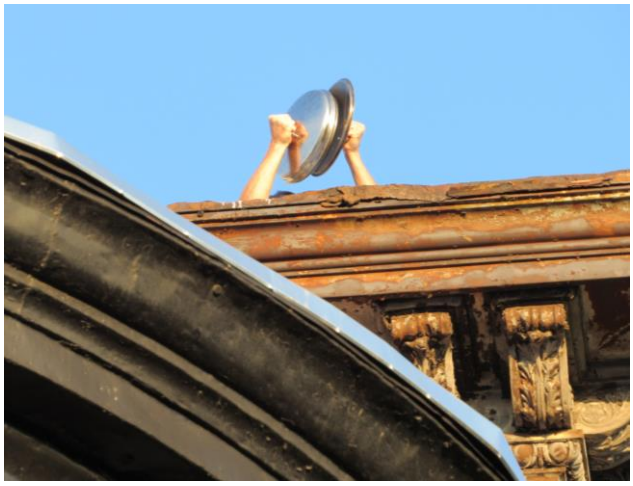

Figure 1. Visual Observation 1. Roof Cymbals. Photo by Jerry Krase

Figure 2. Visual Observation 2: The Bus. Photo by Jerry Krase

Another way by which essential workers, especially those at a nearby hospital, were thanked was by placing 'thank you' signs outside of buildings. I surveyed the face-block and nearby streets for such grateful signage. I had studied the same streets for visible responses in the aftermath of destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 (Krase 2014), although most signs were simple, such a heart, others were very elaborate, and many were done by or with the help of young children as those below.

Figure 3. Visual Observation 3: Thank You. Photo by Jerry Krase

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Figure 4. Visual Observation 4: Thank You Essential Workers. Photo by Jerry Krase

Because Prospect Park remained open during the lockdown people from all over the borough came to enjoy the space. The crowding was moderated by official signage that instructed park goers about safer behaviors. While looking for signs during my walks I came across a hand-drawn sign that warned, among other things, not to 'organize play dates with other peoples' kids.'


Figure 5. Visual Observation 5: Hand-Drawn Sign. Photo by Suzanne Nicoletti-Krase

The New York City Police Department also had a large flashing lighted sign that intermittently signaled 'Be Safe', and 'Wear Masks'.

Figure 6. Visual Observation 6: NYPD Sign. Photo by Jerry Krase

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Signalling 'Crisis' in an Affective Manner: Government, Media and Public Cooperation during COVID-19 in South Korea

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During the COVID-19 outburst in 2020, South Korea has operated a unique and successful plan to block the pandemic, while allowing workplaces and extensive parts of daily life to continue to operate. By July 2020, there were only around 13,000 diagnosed patients and less than 300 dead among a population of 51 million that was not put under lockdown. The most broadly mentioned reasons for that success are fast governmental response and the public's cooperation. I suggest that by using unusual visual markers during the media coverage of their actions the authorities managed to signal 'controllable crisis', in a manner that encouraged the public to follow the suggested actions voluntarily.

The media appearances of government officials during the crisis used verbal content and material symbols that drove the public to cooperate with unusual demands and suggestions. This marks a breach from the ways in which other recent crises such as the nuclear tension with North Korea, the sinking of the Sewŏl Ferry in 2014 and the Japan-Korea trade dispute in 2019 were handled. In these previous crises the public reacted with dissent and mass protests, voicing support for or objection to government policies.

Seoul has a unique democratic protest culture and several mass protests in the early 21st century achieved their goals; among them, the notorious weekly rally to impeach the president in 2016-7. The commonly generalized view expressed in world media that Koreans are docile citizens because of their Confucian heritage (for example, Escobar 2020; Purnell 2020) does little to address the actual reality. As my recent ethnography about protest in Seoul shows (Sarfati 2018), the Korean public has proved its power over policy makers through their mass dissent practices, which made the current government especially sensitive to the outcomes of dire conditions. Thus, when the Covid-19 virus outbreak began, the efforts to control the disease and minimize the damage where held simultaneously on the bio-medical and the socio-political levels. In order to implement severe measures, there was a need to signal 'crisis' in a fast and affective manner.

Signal is a word that has been extended into anthropology from its common usage in zoological research to indicate 'a means by which to stimulate an action' (Bertra 2014: 64). I find this word relevant here because, especially in matters of life and death, 'symbolic structures coming out of society must be able to find an equivalent in signals' (ibid.: 70). It is mostly outside the realm of conscious perception that signals are actors that produce human acts. In our times, affective signalling is performed increasingly through mass media that combines verbal utterances with symbolic images. In the case of the Corona pandemic, the danger has been both biological and social, creating confusion and severe regulations in many countries. Less so in South Korea.

The country has demonstrated fast, decisive and effective measures to stop the spread of corona through broad screening for the virus, immediate handling of local outbreaks and general readiness of the health system (a result of the Sars and Mers viruses outbreaks in 2003 and 2015). The five steps plan that the government advertised where nicknamed in English by the ministry of foreign affairs with the acronym TRUST, which stands for: Transparency (announcing publicly the confirmed patients' whereabouts), Responsibility (expecting the public to follow willingly the suggested actions, while the authorities are responsible for maintaining stability in the economy and daily life), United actions (joining the forces of government, research institutions and private companies), Science and Speed (innovative technologies and their fast implementation) and Together (no discrimination against certain social groups, and sharing knowledge globally). This plan was discussed at length in various media outlets.

The officials' outfits were among the most notable recurrent patterns in their media appearances to announce these actions. They used face masks and wore a light-yellow jacket, which is used only in emergency situations in Korea. In a society where wearing less than a formal suit in such media speeches is unthinkable, the casual pattern and outstanding colour of the jacket immediately drew viewers' attention. Moreover, the fact that all the officials, regardless of gender and rank, from the President to the Secretary of the health department wore exactly the same jacket also signalled solidarity and unison in the face of danger rather than normative hierarchy. From February 2020, Mun Chae-in, the President, and other government officials were often shown visiting hospitals, factories and markets wearing masks and the yellow jackets, thus signalling that life can continue but attention must be paid to the prevention of the virus' spread.

I use the word *signal* rather than *symbol*, because this outfit is meant to stir immediate response rather than a culture-informed observation. It serves as an unsettling object, which, like other signals in the world of animals, 'reveals the presence of a thing, a situation, an event, or a condition' (Bertra 2014: 64). Yellow jackets have been associated in Korea with national emergency since 1975, when the dictatorship passed the Basic Civil Defence Act [*minbangwi kibonbŏp*], and have been used by most presidents ever since to note an emergency or national grief over certain deaths. Yellow is a colour through which animals manifest that they are poisonous and dangerous creatures. Moreover, in Korea yellow has come to signify, in the past six years, social solidarity in fighting tyranny in the mass protests against former president Pak Kŭn-hye [Park Gun-hye] (Kim 2018, Sarfati 2018, Sarfati and Chung 2018). Thus, the yellow jackets have an established cultural significance.

Yet emergency yellow jackets were used much more extensively in the Corona crisis, spanning several weeks of constant usage, as opposed to singular media appearances in previous short-term crises. Koreans observing the informative presentations by officials clad in these jackets could not remain neutral. From the early days, they internalized the notion that the situation was alarming. This affective signal was augmented by numerous images of sanitizing crews wearing full protective gear, which always accompanied Corona news. These 'space travel style' crews demonstrated that governmental actions are in process at all times.

With proper signalling of the situation as a controllable crisis, the South Korean authorities managed to solicit their public's cooperation and slow the spread of the virus much better than other countries.

However, as the previous dissent movements in Korea prove, acceptance and public cooperation were not pre-secured reactions to the governmental efforts to signal crisis. The Korean public, who is the recipient of the signal, is not a naïve crowd that ignores the option of manipulation, tyranny and abuse by those in power. Thus, their cooperative response in the times of Corona is tightly related to the manner in which they interpreted that signal. Had they viewed the government as manipulative, they could have interpreted the signal for crisis as a means to control the crowd rather than a reasonable response to a health threat. The public has been aware of cases where 'manipulative signaling' was used through a fake demonstration of emotions (Leys 2017: 370-2). Such a manipulation is performed in order to extract a wanted reaction from the recipient for purposes that are not related to the signal. For example, when in 2016 the impeached president said that she cared for the Korean people, the public viewed this as a false statement.

On the other hand, in 2020, the government's signals were interpreted as 'uncheatable', which are impossible to fake (Leys 2017: 273). The suggested guidelines broadcast in media on a daily basis were not intended only to trigger a basic emotion of fear in the face of danger, but also to drive people to actions that were explained with scientific data. The public was called to use cognitive interpretation for processing and accepting the guidelines as the most rational path of action under the circumstances. There has been little legal outlining or enforcement of social distancing and other similar measures. Instead, the officials stated repeatedly that the public is asked to cooperate. Later, when some individuals or groups refused to be tested for Covid-19, they were prosecuted without much public objection.

Thus, when the authorities implemented self-supervised home-isolation and technological tracking systems to catch violators, people did not take to the streets to protest the breach of privacy rights. When certain groups, such as the Sinchonji Christian church refused to cooperate, no one objected to them being quarantined. Laws that allow doctors to test for Covid-19 even against patients' will were passed and accepted broadly. In general, the public has practiced social distancing, hygiene rules and mask use. The media appearances of government officials successfully signalling 'crisis', led to the perception of their actions as well-informed policies, and resulted in a joint effort to overcome the Covid-19 outbreak. Understanding the psychological as well as socio-cultural need for transparency, consistency, reassurance and scientific knowledge while learning that a crisis is looming was the baseline for the coordinated government-media coverage of the situation. Obtaining extensive public cooperation proved no less crucial than the professional management of the health system and bio-science.

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Audience, TV Ratings and Digital Platforms: Situating Pandemic Media Regulations in Turkey

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In this article I address how the audience consumption of mainstream television and digital media platforms have changed, if at all, during the pandemic in Turkey. As mainstream television consumption in Turkey has been steadily declining in the last two decades, digital platform subscriptions have increased, with their uses diversified (entertainment, education and etcetera). In the last two decades, the Turkish series streaming on digital platforms have wielded considerable 'soft power' in the global media market, contributing to Turkey's positive image, especially in the Balkans and the Middle East. Digital streaming platforms have provided alternatives to classical means of cultural diplomacy, sometimes by promoting images of a Europeanized Turkey and other times by highlighting its cultural uniqueness and authenticity. Three significant changes mark the pandemic media world in Turkey. Firstly, despite the increase in the time spent in front of the screen and in digital platform subscriptions, the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council has taken measures to extend censorship rules to alternative streaming services. This has generated significant public criticism and may be indicative of an anxiety over losing Turkey's credibility and soft power in the global world. Secondly, the use of mainstream television as a source of news on Covid-19 has increased significantly. Thirdly, the reliance on television and digital media platforms regarding news on Covid-19 have come to mark social, cultural and political distinctions in Turkey. The present discussion addresses these three changes, reflecting on how audiences' viewing habits of mainstream television and digital platforms change and transform.

Audience, Television and Digital Platforms in Turkey

In the last two decades, in Turkey, like in many other countries, the mainstream television broadcasting has largely lost its audience to digital media. Today, there are 56 million viewers over the age of 5 in Turkey, nearly 41% of whom receive the signal via the digital platforms broadcasting over satellite and OTTs (Twentify Report 2018). The people watching 'television content' no longer stick to a single screen. Nor do they feel bound by the broadcaster's content preferences and broadcast time frames. In the pandemic context, Netflix, for instance, doubled expectations, adding nearly 16 million new subscribers and reaching 183 million in the first quarter of 2020 (Alexander 2020). In Turkey, this figure is estimated to have reached 1.7 million in the same period.

Since the commercialization of the television industry in Turkey in the 1990s, television consumption has mostly consisted of watching TV serials, especially on prime time. Thus, television has mainly functioned as an 'entertainment box' and to some extent a state apparatus of ideological significance. In this respect, social research that aims to understand Turkish

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society largely accounts for the audience' viewing habits of prime-time serials productions. Research indicates that people think that what they see on the screen is a realistic reflection of Turkish society (Dağsalgüler 2020). It is commonly stated that the serials normalize and legitimize the given hierarchies, social structures and possibly social problems, like domestic violence. Similarly, serials that unreasonably glorify the Ottoman past are often taken as historic reality (Aydın 2019), and serials that celebrate the Turkish military might are cherished by an audience indoctrinated by a nationalist ideology.[1] Pardo has analyzed how rulers 'may try to educate people to their values and vision. They may choose to be coercive or persuasive; or they may opt for one of the many possible mid-way positions between these two extremes' (Pardo 2000, quoted in Pardo and Prato 2019: 21). Overall, mainstream television in Turkey has historically created very functional illusions, myths and popular ideas that serve to govern the people. To some extent, the digitalization process has hindered these functions of mainstream television. Domestic drama productions and Turkish serials have been globally acclaimed and exported to other countries, generating significant income. Digital platforms aimed at global audiences have produced different myths and illusions regarding 'us' and alternative aesthetic forms and thematic content.

As well as an 'entertainment box', Turkish TV has historically functioned as the prime source of news and public information. In spite of the fact that the internet is now a faster, if not always more accurate, source of information, the 'stay-home' calls in the post-pandemic period have enhanced peoples' interest in mainstream television, particularly to hear the news on the pandemic and on the global scientific research on the virus. Every day, the usual broadcast stream is routinely interrupted by the editors to air the Health Minister's daily address to the nation. During the seven o'clock news, the health minister discloses the daily figures and gives advice on how to avoid the coronavirus infection. In this period, television watching habits have changed significantly, with increasing rating figures and an increase in screen time from 4 hours to an average of 8 hours (Kantar-Group M Report 2020). I contend that this change is due to the fact that the public see the pandemic as a global issue that requires national measures; therefore, they resort to mainstream television to hear several actors' views on the matter, including the Ministry of Health, the Turkish Medical Association, independent doctors and politicians.

This increase raises the question whether, in times of crisis, television remains the main source of news in Turkey and whether viewers trust the mainstream media more than digital platforms. Distrust in the digital media has become more significant in the pandemic context. Research suggests that only about a third of Turkey's population find social media to be a reliable source of information. Besides the issue of trust, the 'digital divide' between different age and socio-economic groups also explains preference for mainstream television over social media (Nalçaoğlu 2020). For instance, it is commonly known that, in the last decade or so, the government (the Presidency) has used the national television as a mass mobilizer and a

[1] On indoctrination and mechanisms of legitimation across different social, cultural and political fields, see Pardo and Prato (2019).

manufacturer of consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Almost 70% of national television outlets are under strict government control; they have been dubbed the 'pool media'. In this climate, the opposition groups have come to see the alternative media (digital platforms on the internet) as more reliable. To put it differently, although television consumption has generally increased during the pandemic, in the last decade or so, the distinction between the consumers of mass TV and of digital platforms increasingly mark certain social and political divisions in Turkey.

It is worth mentioning the role of television as a medium of distant education in the pandemic period. Distance education via television has been another important factor in the increased popularity of traditional television. In Turkey, like in many other countries, distance education has been carried out via the internet too. However, alongside the internet education broadcasts, the Turkish authorities have delivered the educational content by creating new TV channels (known as EBA TV) with the help of public broadcasting service TRT. This was done in order to minimize inequalities in the access to education for those who do not have computers or internet services at home (Mueller and Taj 2020).

To open a parenthesis, according to 2019 figures, 72% of the Turkish population have access to the internet. Of this total, 63% are active in the social media and 53% are mobile social media users (HootSuite et al. 2019). However, the use of laptop and desktop computers, which are more suitable devices for educational purposes, is still limited (48%). Tse of smart phones is more common (77%) than desktops and laptops. However, smart phones are mainly used to access the social media for entertainment purposes, not for education. In this respect, it would be appropriate to refer to the mobile phone as the new entertainment box in Turkey, since mobile phones have become tiny TV sets in people's pockets. Nevertheless, the use of television as an educational device by the Ministry of Education underlines its informative function in times of crisis.

Against this background, it is worth asking whether the division between television and digital platforms like Netflix has eroded under pandemic conditions. The order, 'stay home' as a measure against the spread of infection has corresponded with an increase in the use of digital media by people over 55, mainly as a means of communication, socialization and political opposition. Even if the national television outlets have been under political control, digital platforms, OTTs and video streaming media have remained impervious to political grip. Even the government's Covid-19 news have been challenged by various opposition groups over the social media. A new regulatory scheme was introduced to handle this situation by means of a by-law issued on 1st August 2019. With this regulation, RTUK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) has assumed responsibility to regulate the internet in addition to television broadcasting.

In line with the increasing conservatism in Turkey and on Turkish 'screens', following a change in the rating measurement sampling method in 2012, it is generally believed that more conservative lower and lower-middle socio-economic groups matter more to the advertisers. This has practically eliminated viewer preferences of the AB socio-economic group from the

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television screens. The opposition groups who have lost trust in the officially disseminated information rely more on the internet for information and entertainment consumption.[2] With the pandemic censorship regulations, the groups who are sceptical about traditional television screens have become the new target for content control.

Political control is not limited to information function of the media. Since television serials have become a huge industry in Turkey in the last couple of decades, their content has also been scrutinized by the government. '*Dizi*' exports (Bhutto 2019) brought millions of dollars to the Turkish economy. Sold to various countries, including the neighbouring Arab states, Latin America and China, *dizis* are seen as a kind of soft power in the international arena disseminating ideologically significant images and ideas (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013, Yanardağoğlu and Karam 2013). For instance, the successful Netflix *Rise of Empire: Ottoman* was criticised by government circles because it supposedly depicted Sultan Mehmet as an occupier rather than as a 'conqueror'. Equipped with wide and blurry laws regulating obscenity, Turkish family structure, the protection of historic Turkish figures and so on, and with regulations involving the promotion of tobacco and alcoholic products, RTUK is increasingly scrutinizing content in digital platforms.

To summarize, the fear of infection and government orders kept more people at home during the pandemic. The new censorship laws which regulate digital platforms have sharpened both political divisions and audience choices in relation to television and digital platforms. On the one hand, opposition groups tend to use digital platforms more. On the other hand, the public initially resorted more to mainstream television for news and education purposes; however, as the trust in the officially disseminated knowledge deteriorated, the reliance on digital platforms for reliable news increased. The digital media have been acknowledged to enable unmediated communication, and solidarity grew among the population. At the same time, it remains to be seen whether the Turkish government will continue to extend its control on content to the digital outlets and how it will manage the challenge of controlling digital media under conditions of rapid technological change.

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Pandemic, Protest, and Pandemonium: North Brooklyn, USA

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When I first proposed this essay, it was going to focus on public responses to and representations of this global pandemic with a focus on North Brooklyn. Since that time, however, a series of individual events have occurred in the U.S. and converged. Thus, the focus has broadened.

In early March, there were reports of elders dying in nursing homes in Seattle, Washington from Covid-19. This quickly spread and New York City became the epicentre in the U.S. Residents were told by Governor Andrew Cuomo to 'stay at home', and engage in social distancing (6 feet apart). Wearing masks was eventually advised by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). This was additional advice to social distancing and was beneficial in New York City, since it is difficult to maintain a space of 6 feet on city sidewalks. Children's playgrounds were closed. Sidewalks and residential stoops became substitutes.

North Brooklyn has become a vibrant destination for new residents and visitors. The East River waterfront has a new built community of mostly luxury high-rise developments, with some affordable units, and boutique hotels. These towers include upscale stores and restaurants at street level. Greenpoint's waterfront development is in at an earlier stage, but it is underway. The loud banging of pile driving is heard daily. A commuter ferry service was re-established. One had existed prior to the Great Depression (Reiss 2001). Trendy, boutique clothing stores, and bars have taken root near the waterfront as well as on the other commercial streets within the neighbourhoods. Many small, local businesses have been replaced by corporate chains such as Starbucks. Other merchants have been forced to close because of dramatic rent increases. The cost of living, in terms of food, housing and other services, has substantially increased thereby pricing out the working class and poor. Even modest row houses are selling for millions of dollars. Gut renovations of older residential properties are common, and luxury condominium and rental developments sprout from any available single lot or assembled parcels of land. The old ethnic flavour of these neighbourhoods has diminished. It is now more upscale, mainstream, multi-ethnic, selling artisanal wares. Williamsburg in particular is known internationally for its youth (hipster) culture and as a host to artistic and musical events. This transformation has not completely obliterated Williamsburg's Latinx and Hasidic Jewish communities where publicly supported housing exists, but the Latinx community has declined. In addition, the Polish community in Greenpoint has also been diminished by the increasing cost of housing and more general cost of living. The trendy, hipster culture of Williamsburg has spread to Greenpoint and Bushwick. This rebuilt and reconfigured community is in stark contrast to its industrial and deindustrialized past.

As in its industrial past, North Brooklyn continues to be a live/play/work community. This was not altered by the pandemic. Establishments selling alcoholic drinks and food

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continued to operate exclusively through take-out. Taps of beer were brought to the front door and customers were served outside. Cocktails were sold 'to-go'. Patrons would gather outside the front door of establishments. The idea of social distancing was either forgotten or ignored by some.

A sunny, warm Spring day and many are out. Some ignore recommendations for social distancing and mask wearing. People have congregated in Transmitter Park and crowd Franklin Street. The pizza slice shop remains a point of gathering. Residential stoops are used as a dining room. McCarren Park is also crowded. Many languages are heard. Young visitors are in town (Field notes, 2 May 2020).

Domino Park became so crowded that the *New York Times* reported the following account. At Domino Park in Williamsburg, a masked park employee walked amid sunbathers and picnickers, pointing to his face and telling people to put their masks on. Eric Freeman, 27, a mixed martial arts fighter who lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, pulled the mask around his chin up over his mouth when he was confronted, only to pull it back down when the park employee was gone. 'The mask is really annoying', he said, lifting a paper cup filled with what appeared to be pink lemonade. 'How do you drink with a mask on?' (Goldstein and Kilgannon 2020).

Social distancing circles were later created in the park to keep people apart (Schultz 2020). Meanwhile there was racial bias in the enforcement of social distancing. Black and Brown individuals were arrested, while in White communities masks were distributed *(*Southall 2020).

Masks have become a fashion statement. They are sold and bought in all styles, colours and prints. Even 'The Gap' clothing store features denim masks with the caption, 'We've got you covered'. Mask wearing varies for each person as well. Some do not cover their nose, while others wear them under their chin. And there are those who do not wear one at all.

In March a young, black woman, Brionna Taylor, who was an emergency medical technician was killed by Louisville, Kentucky police as they raided her home in error. She was asleep (Burke 2020). In addition, a 25-year-old black man, Ahmaud Arbery, was chased, gunned down and killed in southern Georgia. After public outcry, three white men were finally arrested (Fausset 2020). Anger against police violence toward black citizens has been raging throughout U.S. history. The final straw came with the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by a police officer chocking him with his knee. With this, U.S. cities erupted into protests and in some places, looting also occurred. But the killing of black men does not end there, and the list continues to grow.

This series of individual events, Covid-19, a 'stay at home' policy, Black, Brown, and low-income persons disproportionately contracting and dying from the virus (Blow 2020), the continued display of racial bias, brutality and killings by police officers, unemployment and loss of jobs, and George Floyd's death by choking sparks a social movement. All of these events unite to create this moment in history, reminiscent of Weber's notion of elective affinity (Weber 1958).

There is a joining of crises. As protests, looting and arson continue in cities around the U.S. as well as in Black communities in Brooklyn, North Brooklyn shows signs of a somewhat usual Saturday night. There are groups gathered on street corners engaged in loud conversations. And the streets near the waterfront connecting Greenpoint and Williamsburg are populated with pedal bicyclists and electric powered bikes. The nightly soundtrack during this pandemic includes NYPD helicopters patrolling the city.

Silent protests take place in McCarren Park, and pop-up protests throughout North Brooklyn. Domino Park served as a destination for protesters marching over the Williamsburg Bridge from Manhattan (Field notes, Saturday, 30May 11pm-7 June, 2020).

The pandemonium during this juncture stems from the Trump Administration and their unwillingness to address the virus in any rational way. The U.S. was completely unprepared for it, even though it was foreseen. Trump engaged in racist rhetoric by referring to Covid-19 as the 'Chinese virus'. He denies science and expert scientists and medical authorities. Trump denies the virus and takes the position that it will go away. He disagrees with the renowned Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and has recommended treatments to Americans without medical basis or knowledge. He will not wear a mask. He recently held a campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Some of his supporters wore masks while others did not. People were not systematically kept apart, nor were masks required. He proudly claimed that he told his officials to slow down testing for the virus because testing increases the cases. Meanwhile, around the country there is presently an uptick in new cases where places re-opened quickly. Trump wants states re-opened in order to get the economy moving. By not addressing the virus, he is responsible for the economic decline. There is an expression that is used, 'the fish stinks from the head'. We are witnesses to it. This President incites hate among diverse groups of Americans. He has unleashed and condones white supremacy. During the protests, he walked to a church near the White House with members of the administration to hold up a bible. As police cleared the crowds in his path, they used rubber bullets and tear gas on peaceful protesters exercising their freedom of speech. He used the Fourth of July, U.S. Independence Day, to declare that he will 'defeat the radical left' (BBC News 2020).

As New York City has entered Phase 2 of re-opening, more people are out in North Brooklyn. Playgrounds contain children and their guardians once more. Hair salons are busy again, some with schedules full weeks in advance. Outdoor dining has opened with restaurants arranging tables and serving customers on the sidewalk or in the street. There are fewer people wearing face masks. Given where New York City began as the epicentre of Covid-19, it has done well and plans to re-open fully in August. Phase 3 of re-opening: mostly personal care businesses, started in early July with the exception of indoor restaurant dining. That has been delayed with the resurgence of cases in other states and poor compliance to safety guidelines (McKinley and Ferre-Sadurni 2020). New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo advised, 'our actions today determine our numbers tomorrow […] I strongly urge everyone to closely follow state guidance on safe practices and local governments to enforce that guidance. Being New

York tough means being New York smart: wear a mask, wash your hands and practice social distancing' (Loud 2020).

The future of everyday life within the context of this pandemic is unclear, and this essay raises more questions than it answers. How has these crises affected North Brooklyn? Will the large-scale development projects continue? Do their designs make sense given communal spaces and gyms? Will there be too many buildings that eventually lay dormant? What is the fate of small businesses and trendy boutiques? Some have already closed. And how will ordinary people, who find themselves unemployed, survive and recover while the larger city is also in dire need of recovery? In Spike Lee's new short film, New York, New York, he pays tribute to New York City and films a city on 'pause' at the height of the virus with empty streets, but overcrowded and harried medical facilities. Lee comments, 'I would not want to be in any other place in the world, but here in the epicenter' (Spike Lee 2020).

Figure 1. Social Distancing. Photo by the Author.


Figure 2. Waiting at a Pizza Slice Shop. Photo by the Author.

Figure 3. Residents Engaged in Protests.

Figure 4. Correcting Trump's Advice. Photos by the Author.

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COVID-19 and Community Supported Agriculture: The Uncertain Promise of Food Security[1]

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During the early months of the pandemic, alternative urban farming practices garnered more attention from a wider audience. One such practice is the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)-type projects, which saw a boon in interest and activity. For some, this new level of interest is a potential sign of a new era of food security for all. However, there are major roadblocks, primarily that CSA-type projects are prohibitively expensive and thus inaccessible to many. While touted as community supported, CSA farms tend to be supported by well-to-do individuals and families and thus the benefits of the farm's produce are generally only made available to those that are not susceptible to food insecurity.

CSA is a form of alternative agriculture. Modelled on beliefs of environmental sustainability, organic produce, combating climate change and fostering a community, CSAs are one of the more successful attempts at alternative farming in the West. In Europe and the United State there are roughly 20,000 CSA-type projects in operation. Between the farmer(s), members and volunteers, a CSA produces shares of fruit and vegetables for the paying members each week. CSAs attract a variety of people with different backgrounds and interests, but being a member of a CSA is primarily a middle-class endeavour.

The ethnography was collected during fieldwork between 2018 and 2020 on a CSA in the Greater Dublin Area, Ireland. Using this material, I will discuss the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the beliefs of my research participants in relation to their role in the future of food security and the issues that arise when those beliefs are challenged by the current state of the CSA model.

Food is always on the frontline of a crisis, be it issues of food availability for at risk communities, domestic production or importing and exporting. During the catastrophic First and Second World Wars, the Victory Gardens of the United States and their counterparts, the War Gardens of the United Kingdom and Germany, produced food for impoverished citizens and the continuation of the war effort. In more recent crises, community-centred farms and gardens have been used to combat food insecurity. The current pandemic is no different, and a discourse similar to that of the war garden ignited in the recent emergency. Take, for example, the title of a CBS article published on 5 April 2020, 'Victory Gardens for the War Against COVID-19' (D'Amelio 2020). While the article focuses on the United States, the evocation of the Victory Garden lends itself to the feelings of severity and inexorable change felt by my research participants, many of whom discussed the possible new reality that the seemingly tectonic shift in public discourse might afford them. For them, the idea that CSAs could become

[1] I would like to thank Mairéad for all her support throughout my doctoral studies. I would also like to thank the Irish Research Council; without their funding this research would not be possible.

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an integral part of food production in the near future, potentially removing the threat of food insecurity for all through sustainable farming seemed one step closer to being actualised. The wider middle-class turn toward local food production has been growing for some time, with a move toward locally grown organic produce. However, the concentration of attention toward alternative urban farming practices during the most severe weeks of lockdown was unparalleled. During this time of what Samimian-Darash (2013) calls 'potential uncertainty',[2] people began to look to alternative ways of ensuring access to food. Issues of food security are not new, but from the perspective of the Irish middle class, the pandemic shined a light on the fallibility of even the most seemingly secure Western food networks. In the uncertain scenario of the pandemic, CSAs seemingly offer an alternative to the established food networks of industrial farms and supermarkets.

At the onset of the pandemic in March there was a run on certain staple food products in supermarkets. This led to temporary shortages throughout the country. While only temporary, the shortages coupled with the pandemic in general had a noticeable effect on interest in the CSA among the local town's community. Although for much of March and April the farm was closed to everyone but the head farmer, membership applications increased dramatically. When the first harvest shares became available in June, later than the first harvest in April of previous years, curious passers-by expressed their newly-found awareness of the locally grown produce. Surprise at the variety and availability of produce was a consistent reaction from both members and non-members. When harvest shares resumed, social distancing was implemented when working on the farm and collecting shares. An outdoor collection stand was installed to allow for social distancing and face masks were mandatory for volunteers, when handling food and for members on collection days. These measures not only adhered to the hygiene guidelines but also ensured a safe and predictable experience for all involved.

Wutich and Brewis state; 'food insecurity creates uncertainty and unpredictability' (2014: 451). For my participants, local urban agriculture, primarily the CSA, is the obvious choice to combat the uncertainty created by food insecurity. Due to its small scale, the CSA is much more resilient and adaptable to change than its large-scale industrial cousins. However, the perception of CSA-type projects being the answer to food insecurity may not be the solution its proponents hope it to be. DeMuynck uncovered that 'the experience of being at the [farmers'] market is often more important than the products that they purchase there' (2019: 12). From discussions with volunteers and members at the CSA, it was clear that a similar mindset to the visitors of farmer's markets was carried by some of those who came to collect their share of fruit and vegetables each week of the season. A research participant explained that joining the CSA was down simply to having the spare income and that the CSA seemed like a nice idea. For some, the experience or the kudos one can claim for supporting a local project are more valuable than the products provided.

Financially supporting a community farming project such as the CSA, or buying food at a farmers' market, are middle class endeavours, reserved for those who can afford the above average prices and the annual subscription fees. Due to the relatively small scale and sporadic

[2] Specifically, the 'space between what has occurred and what is about to occur' (2013: 3).

nature of outside funding, government or otherwise, CSA projects in Ireland source much of their financial support through membership subscriptions. The income from subscription fees ensures the CSA can continue to operate.[3] And yet, it is those who cannot afford CSA membership that are far more likely to struggle with food insecurity, not the middle-class a CSA tends to attract.

Urban centres throughout the West, including neighbourhoods in Toronto, Glasgow and Belfast, are home to identified 'food deserts'. A food desert can be defined as an urban area in which it is almost impossible to obtain affordable nutritious food. In the Greater Dublin Area, there are no official 'food deserts' but many people still cannot access good quality, nutritious food. During lockdown the 'food desert' problem undoubtedly intensified; the increased lack of accessibility to supermarkets and restrictions on public transport (which in some cases was stopped entirely) exacerbated matters further. Some of my research participants advocate the creation of more CSA projects to combat food deserts. But, as already stated, people on a low or extremely low income, who are most susceptible to the effects of food deserts, would not be in a position to afford a membership. Even supplementary donations on subscriptions to subsidise fees, a tactic employed at the CSA where I volunteered, are not enough to support many additional members. Regardless of the surge in interest in urban farming projects, those who are at most risk in a crisis — whether it be the result of a virus or an economic collapse — still find the produce out of reach.

Another noteworthy issue is the kind of community the CSA fosters. While the intention is that the CSA should be part of the geographic community where it is situated, it tends instead to be focused on its own cultural community. While it is true that this cultural community is exclusive in several ways, especially because of the previously mentioned cost of entrance, it is also true that it proved invaluable to members who were required to self-isolate, forming a network of care they could access whether they required their food share to be delivered or were in need of other assistance. Delivery was carried out on an informal basis, generally consisting of members picking up shares for other members they knew. On occasion the head farmer would deliver shares to members as well. However, this community network does not currently spread far beyond the confines of the CSA's community, if at all. In the vision of the future portrayed by research participants and the media, the CSA is a pillar of the community that is accessible to all. In reality this is not yet the case.

For many research participants, accessible, locally produced organic produce is a resource for those who lack access to nutritious and sustainable food. As stated however, food produced by the CSA is unattainable by those who reside outside of the middle classes. As it currently stands, it would seem that the values held by the CSA are not being fully realised. Many factors are, of course, outside the control of the CSA itself but as the notion of 'accessibility to all' is of great importance there appears to be discrepancies. Next to the matter of accessibility is the issue of eco-ethics, or rather an arguably misguided form of eco-ethics exploited by rampant

[3] In many cases, the subscription fees only cover the minimum expenses of a CSA. Rarely do the subscriptions alone allow for investment in large projects, instead going toward the farmer's pay and farm maintenance.

commodification. Throughout the alternative agriculture movement there are issues around the moralising of the local produce and the installation of a moralising framework upon those who can afford to be part of the community and those who cannot. Buying imported food with unknown origins and an assumed high carbon footprint, not only are people who shop in supermarkets or discount stores judged to be less moral because they choose to feed their families with less nutritious food but also because, in the process, they contribute to damage the environment. Choosing to support a project like the CSA, one might claim moral superiority because of one buys from a farm in one's community, high entrance cost and all. There is the obvious appeal of more nutritious, organic food of course, and for some this is the main attraction of local community farms, but it is difficult to ignore the eco-ethically charged discourse and values attributed to being part of a project like CSA. One must also ask whether this shift is truly being fostered in a new cooperative spirit, in resistance to neoliberalism, or is simply feeding into the creation and exploitation of an unwittingly commodified eco-ethics or environmental ethics. It is worth noting here, that much like the famers' market in DeMuynck's piece, the CSA is always under threat as 'being used to construct a commodified eco-ethical cultural image' (2019: 14).

The apparent shift in the general public's attitude as a result of the pandemic has emboldened alternative urban agriculture projects. My CSA field site is no different. In group text messages and during the interviews I conducted during the early stages of the pandemic, participants were clear in their sense of renewed vigour. While the human toll taken by the virus has been overwhelming, the situation has created unprecedented support amongst the CSA's community. Touted by some as the silver lining, COVID-19 has been labelled a catalyst of sorts for the CSA farm and other similar projects, and to a healthier future for the local community and eventually society as a whole. Alongside much of the environmental activist spectrum, the pandemic is seen by many in the alternative food production realm as the signal flare for change. A battle cry from the Guardian newspaper echoes the sentiment; 'Not everyone can access locally farmed food, especially in urban areas. We need to expand and fund initiatives such as urban farms, community gardens and mobile food markets' (Matei 2020). It may very well be that we are standing on the precipice of a new age in urban food growing, an age in which the reality of universal food security in urban spaces is realised. But, as it stands, only time will tell if this pandemic will result in community supported agriculture becoming an integral part of our urban communities. It seems far more likely that for the foreseeable future Community Supported Agriculture will remain only available to, and supported by, the middle classes. It is difficult to know if the renewed public interest in community farming projects is the sign of a permeant shift in Irish, and wider Western, attitudes or if it is a temporary blip that will fade alongside the memory of the destruction wrought by the virus.

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Cinema and Digital Platforms: Pandemic Configurations of Text, Context and Technology

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Conventional media theories, including mediatization theory, network theory and actor network theory, are dominated by the idea that the emergence of information/communication technologies are driven by human need and address global social problems. However, as is the case with the use of interactive digital media platforms during the corona virus pandemic, technologies turn illnesses into opportunities and introduce new logics of governmentality.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1977 [1975]) writes on how the fight against the plague has produced the raw material for disciplinary technologies. Likewise, it is not difficult to imagine that the so-called war against the coronavirus will produce a range of truths, discourses and, above all, technologies to govern individuals and the economies of desire.

For example, video conference technologies have long been in use; yet, the pandemic enabled their latent possibilities to operate with a progressive, exponential increase of added value. Zoom was launched in 2013; yet, as of March 2020, the business has thrived with a 380% increase in the number of daily users and 77% increase in net worth.[1] Microsoft announced Teams in 2017; then, in the week before the 23rd of March 2020, the company declared a 12 million increase in the number of daily users.[2] Thanks to digital communication technologies, the demise of public life and the University (as universal city), online education and 'zooming into an art work' has never been this legitimate (Pardo and Prato 2019).[3]

Technology is always at first seductive. Digital communication technologies have been praised for being more agile and facilitating flat organizations. Soon after the spike in their popularity, warnings began to circulate against breaches of privacy and 'zoom fatigue'.[4] In a very short time span, these technologies have engendered the collapse of the boundaries between the public and the private and the reduction of different social roles (professional, parent, domestic worker, care taker) to a single social, spatial context.

The pandemic has generalized the previously exceptional use of these technologies. It has led companies to make permanent changes to people's work conditions and virtual classrooms are now considered as viable alternatives to face education. These changes, first introduced as medical necessities and then generalized, are, in fact, political decisions.

In this context, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the interaction between science and politics. The medical sciences can produce knowledge about the development, effects and transformations of the virus and its surrounding habitat, but the necessities the

[1] https://vulcanpost.com/696170/zoom-founder-eric-yuan-net-worth-us7-8b/
[2] https://data-economy.com/microsoft-sees-12-million-new-users-on-teams-as-remote-workers-increase-during-covid-19-pandemic/
[3] https://www.artworkarchive.com/blog/how-to-experience-art-culture-during-coronavirus
[4] https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting

science points out are always complemented with political action. In this interaction between necessity and contingency, medicine increasingly becomes politicised while politics becomes medicalised, which is the very background against which governmental logics proliferate in modernity and particularly during the pandemic.

At a different level, the pandemic has had an impact on the interaction between cinema and digital platforms. Films' visual language and cultural impact have come under scrutiny in the digital era (Rombes 2009, Elsaesser 2016). The experiments with the digital video cameras and non-linear editing programmes have enabled personalized, non-commercial, low-cost independent film making and its widespread distribution. After the pandemic, exception tends to become the norm as the whole film industry is confronted with total digitalization. Films emulate forms such as Youtube videos, web series, and Netflix series. There are debates on digitalization spelling the death of cinema, which in the classic sense was the art of the masses; that is, where art meets the masses. While the coronavirus pushes life into the private domain, we witness the increasing containment of cinema within the private sphere. This is thought-provoking, because cinema is notoriously defined as the most important mass art of late modernity; one which demands a tremendous amount of collective administration in both its production and consumption. Today, cinema reaches the masses but not as an art of the masses. Rather, it is an extremely individualized art form which is consumed individually. This almost dystopic privatization was hitherto unthinkable. Online film viewers are lonely in togetherness.

This togetherness in loneliness is the source of collective paranoias and hysterias in the late modern society. One instance of this increasingly generalised mood is the production and consumption of panic in the media. By re-contextualizing the film text in the Covid-19 agenda, the inter-activity of digital platforms enables the creation of such paranoid, dystopic and apocalyptic narratives.

In what follows, we illustrate this process on the basis of the film *Contagion*, particularly the trailer spectatorship and filmic deliberation. Shortly after Covid-19 lockdowns, several online publishers compiled outbreak-related movie lists (Crucchiola and Ebiri 2020, Goldsmith 2020). Steven Soderbergh's 2011 blockbuster *Contagion* has appeared at the top of most of the Covid-19 compilations. The trailer of the movie has been online on Youtube for almost 9 years and viewed over 26 million times on the platform (Movieclips Trailers 2011).

The significance of the modern-day movie trailer lies not only in its promotional function, relaying the first impression and attracting the audience into watching the full-length movie, but also constituting a meeting and a deliberation hub for film viewers (Johnston et al. 2016: 23). Therefore, we harness the text data of the viewer comments posted under the trailer of *Contagion*, considering it as a medium in itself. In order to determine the more representative entry among many possible trailers of the movie, we ran a Youtube search with the parameters 'Contagion 2011' and selected the first result with a far higher view count. The comment data was retrieved on 6 May 2020, utilizing the video info and comments module of Youtube Data Tools (Rieder 2015), and covers a time span of almost 9 years from 14^{h} July 2011 up to the data collection date.

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In order to observe how Covid-19 agenda contextualizes trailer spectatorship and filmic deliberation, we divided the collected comments into two uneven chronological groups. The division cut-off is 1 January 2020, since the first coronavirus cases was reported in China on 31 December 2020 (WHO 2020). The text data was frequency-tagged through. Words with at least three characters and minimum number of 10 appearances are included in the two wordlists named 'Pre-2020' and '2020'.

At the final stage, we cleaned the data by removing stop words, words containing non-Roman characters and words with lower-upper case differences. The words with no analytical value such as conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions and interjections have also been removed. The data cleaning ultimately yielded a 601-word pre-2020 shortlist and a 940-word 2020 shortlist.

Simple word frequency analysis, the most common technique of the manifest content analysis (Neumann 2011: 364) was conducted over the final shortlists in order to gauge word selection patterns before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. We manually coded Covid-19 related words as (terms, places, institutions and people) as popularized on the mass media. The content analysis was conducted by qualitatively observing the mobility of the vocabulary across the lists as well as their size of use frequency in the comments.

Simple word frequency analysis reveals a significant shift in the composition of the words used in the user comments under the Youtube trailer of *Contagion*. The context, at unprecedentedly global level this time, has seemingly determined the trailer viewer's language use and cultural agenda. While film-specific but general words dominate the Youtube users' vocabulary in the posts in the first eight years (Figure 1), words related to Covid-19 pandemic are prevalent in the comments posted only in five months between 1 January and 6 May 2020.

Figure 1. Relative frequency size of top 1000 words used in user comments posted before 2020.

Drawing on the word-frequency results, it is safe to assert that, until the burst of the global pandemic, the content of *Contagion* and collective knowledge on outbreaks conditioned the

motives behind the language use in user comments. Apart from generic words such as movie, film, people, world, trailer and names of the cast, the most frequent outbreak-related words appear to be virus, flu, outbreak, Ebola, pandemic, disease, infected, plague and vaccine (Figure 2). These words, combined with their possible plural or inflicted forms, are used 1430 times by commenting users in the aforementioned time range, amounting to 6.48% of the pre-2020 list word frequencies.

Figure 2. Relative frequency size of top 1000 words used in user comments posted in 2020.

The 2020 wordlist, on the other hand, consists of 1.5 times more different words (N=941) than the pre-2020 list (N=602). The most frequent outbreak-related words are virus, corona, coronavirus, China, Covid-19, Wuhan, flu, outbreak, Chinese, infected and SARS, including misspelled variants, lower and upper cases variants, plural forms and inflicted variants. These words were used 6541 times in the comments, making up 15.46% of the overall word frequency in the 2020 comments.

Non-existent in the pre-2020 wordlist, the words Corona, Coronavirus and Covid-19 entered the comments posted from 1 January 2020 and climbed up on the word frequency list. Likewise, China and Wuhan, the first epicentre of the pandemic, and bat — in reference to the popular theory that the first human transmission of the virus was from a bat — were among the highest ranked words in the top 100 frequent list.

Many words appeared for the first time in the trailer's comment section after the onset of the pandemic. Among the Covid-19 pandemic related words are Corona, Coronavirus, Covid-19, Wuhan, Covid, Chinese, case, lockdown, symptom, mask, Simpsons and Iran. The shift in the audience's vocabulary was both qualitative and quantitative. While certain Covid-19 words appeared for the first time in the comments section under the movie *Contagion*, they, along with others, ranked among the most frequent words.

As shown in the frequency-based content analysis above, the interactive digital media allows for a reinterpretation and a recontextualization of the film text. The Covid-19 pandemic

has been an unprecedented phenomenon in that a global scale pandemic took place for the first time in history in a context where the global public is densely interconnected. Although limited in scope, the content analysis conducted on a single case shows that the interactive nature of digital platforms serves as a context in which individualized film-viewing experiences translate into collective paranoias and dystopic visions.

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Fighting through Credit: Financial Strategies during the Pandemic in Turkey

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Since the end of the 1990s, Turkey has experienced a growing level of financialization. Financialization refers to the increasing impact of the financial tools on the everyday life (Epstein 2005: 3). Financial tools like loans, credit cards and deposit cards have become an indispensable part of everyday life. These tools have also turned many citizens into debtors. Debts are used as a strategy against extreme poverty and the crisis of neoliberal economies in the global context. I have been conducting research in the financial field since 2015, focusing on the relationship between state, banks and citizens in Turkey.

This short article aims to contribute to the discussions on the effects of the Covid-19 from a financial perspective. I share my early observations on the financial tools introduced by the Turkish government as a strategy to combat this pandemic. The Turkish government proposed two economic programmes, the first in mid-April and the second at the beginning of June. Contrary to other countries which have supported their citizens by providing cash, these economic programmes mainly involve consumer loans or the postponing of credit repayment. Many citizens who lost their regular income and even their jobs are in debt. Household debt has reached 14% of the Gross Domestic Product in Turkey.[1] While state-owned ones have no power to resist providing the listed tools, some private banks are reluctant to do so, which has created tension. We will probably witness various types of power games between the government and banks during this period. Given the current situation, I would like to analyse the relationship between the government, banks and citizens during the pandemic focusing on government regulations.

At the end of December 2019, news about an unknown and deadly disease that had emerged in China spread. The disease started as a 'whistle' in the social media specifically on Twitter, and then turned into a storm. Twitter users started to comment on, share and discuss what was coming and what would be the consequences. After the WHO (World Health Organization) declared that there was a pandemic on 11 March 2020, COVID-19 has become an inseparable part of the everyday life of each individual across the globe. As a researcher and a lecturer, I was following the news and sometimes shared my personal knowledge about the pandemic with my students, who did not take the news seriously and sometimes criticised me for focusing on a virus that had emerged in China, which is far away from Turkey. Turkey declared her first COVID-19-related death on 11 March, and all the schools and universities

[1] https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/ekonomi/2020/03/30/hanehalki-borcu-rekor-seviyelere-ulasti/. Accessed 23 June 2020.

closed and started online education programs. In the following weeks, various obligations were imposed to restore daily life.

Turkey had been going through an economic crisis that had not been officially acknowledged when the public authorities declared Covid-19 related measures. This may be the reason why they chose partial lockdown. Students at all levels have continued their education from their homes; some employees started work from home; most shops, including cafes, restaurants, shopping malls and so on were closed and sent their employees home. The size of the informal work in Turkey is estimated to be around 30% (Uysal 2020). Those working informally have had no options compared to the formally employed. Many civil servants started to work in shifts. Like in many cases across the globe, home has turned into the centre of everyday life for the Turks who can afford to stay at home. Total lockdown was applied to the whole population only at weekends. For more than three months, a curfew was applied to certain sections of the population; specifically, to people under the age of 20 and those over 65. Later, these regulations were relaxed and these groups were allowed to be in streets only for a limited time. Lockdown was applied only in some cities.

The first economic programme was called 'Shield for Economic Stability' and covered citizens and firms. Public banks (Ziraat Bank, Halkbank and Vakıfbank) with their Islamic-based banking branches provide consumer loans from 5,000 TL (Turkish Lira) up to 10,000 TL[2] which can be paid back in 36 instalments with no payment for the first six months. This means that those who receive this loan will be in debt for the next four years. The government has arranged different packages for entrepreneurs who are eligible to receive cheap loans based on their firm's budget and on condition that they will not fire their employees during the pandemic. The waiting time for the delayed credit repayment was extended from 90 days to 180 days. A separate measure increased the lowest retirement payment to 1,500 TL per month. The government also provided short-term employment benefits for both employers and workers who became unemployed because of the Covid-19 related reasons.

The package also provided 1,000 TL cash support from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services for poor families, who are identified as the most vulnerable part of society. Furthermore, options for the postponement of the existing loans from both public and private banks are strongly suggested. Although the main actors in this package are the public banks, private banks are also invited to provide accessible loans for citizens and the delay of the repayment. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a warning to banks unwilling to abide by the laws regulating the provision of new loans.[3] The BDDK (The Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency) launched an investigation into the banks that have not provided easy access to loans and have resisted delaying the loans.[4]

[2] One American Dollar was 6.93 TL on 17 April 2020 when the economic programme was declared. The minimum wage is 2324 TL, which equals to 336 American Dollars.

[3] https://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-dan-ozel-bankalara-tepki-13119847-haberi/. Accessed 19 June 2020.

[4] https://www.bddk.org.tr/ContentBddk/dokuman/duyuru_0822_01.pdf . Accessed 19 June 2020.

The second package was announced at the beginning of June following the Minister of Finance, Berat Albayrak's announcement of the figures on the people covered by the first package: 6,000,617 people used more than 30 billion TL of loans and 4,5 million employees received 6 billion TL as short-term employment benefit. However, we have no information on the number of applicants who did not receive support, and the public is generally critical about these figures. One opposition MP asked to know the number of people who were rejected by the public banks.[5] The criticism regarding people who applied and were either rejected or are still waiting to receive the loan has become public through social media and a few dissident newspapers.[6] The second package involves four different credit packages, including mortgage, vehicle, consumption and holiday loans. All these means of support provided by the public banks are low-interest which aim to boost the economy under the 'new normal'. Considering that the price of both houses and cars started to increase as a result of the low-interest loans, the full effects of the second package are likely to become apparent in the coming months.

As in other countries, people's shopping habits have drastically changed. As many shops were closed, people tended to do their shopping online. Both the payment method and the shopping preferences have changed. On 18 March 2020, the daily maximum limit for contactless payment was increased from 150 TL to 250 TL; the use of this payment was officially encouraged. The Interbank Card Center (BKM) indicated that, during March, 2020 2,5 million contactless cards were used for the first time and 3 million cards were used for the first time for online shopping.

In addition to these packages mainly consisting of options for loans, the government also started a fund-raising campaign and asked people to contribute 10 TL. The President published the bank accounts where the contributions could be sent. This campaign became another issue in the polarization politics.

The sudden and unexpected impact of the Covid-19 has altered people's lives and made structural inequalities more observable. The position of people who are economically insecure has become more fragile and the only option offered by the Turkish government is new loans. A limited number of families have been supported by cash transfers, while most others have been directed to apply for new loans. This has created discontent among the people. Meanwhile, those who have access to social media can follow the response of other countries to the pandemic.

The coalition between the state and the banks has entered a new era. Private banks are forced to follow the new rules set by the state which controls public banks; a control that is gradually getting stricter, compared to the earlier phase of financialization that I discussed in an earlier work (Atalay 2019). This situation might change the rules of the game in the relationship between the private banks and the state.

[5] https://twitter.com/ikoncuk/status/1261363771601108993. Accessed 1 June 2020.

[6] The replies under the tweet of that MP could be viewed at https://www.birgun.net/haber/6-ay-odemesiz-10-bin-tl-destek-kredisi-yilan-hikayesine-dondu-300484. Accessed 23 June 2020.

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Pandemic Ruptures

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I live on the Kentish North Downs, 3 miles south of Canterbury (crow fly distance). The city centre can be reached by car in 10 minutes. A bus that passes through the nearby village (reachable on foot in 15 minutes) three times a day (non-festive) is the only public transport. Having been snowed-in on several occasions, I took to keeping food supplies and other basic necessities in the house. So, although I knew of the 'panic buying' that had occurred in other countries, when on Monday 16 March the UK Prime Minister advised people against 'non-essential' travel and social contacts and to work from home if possible, I did not hasten to the shops. I was working on a book on *Urban Inequalities* for Palgrave (Pardo and Prato eds, forthcoming 2020) mainly from home, and decided to keep my routine. The situation changed drastically in the next few days. Medical Practices moved to remote consultations and the NHS postponed non-urgent operations. Emergency financial packages were announced in support of the homeless and of job retention schemes. On Wednesday 18 March, the PM announced that schools would close from the coming Friday until further notice. The following day, a critical care nurse in tears made the national news; exhausted after a 48-hour shift, she had been unable to buy food from the supermarket. Her heart-breaking appeal to panic-buyers prompted supermarkets to give priority to NHS personnel, while also introducing early shopping hours for the elderly and the vulnerable. Measures to contain contagion were tightened the following Monday, including restrictions on freedom of movement that would be enforced by law.

Suddenly, the media chronicles of deserted cities and empty supermarket shelves made me feel like I was living in a surreal situation and that, 'sheltered' in the countryside, I was getting fragmented information on real life. I had to go into town and see with my own eyes.

Walking through Canterbury's deserted streets, I remembered how I felt when I moved there from London in 1995. Having previously lived in big cities bursting with life until late at night, my heart sank when I experienced the city's forlornness after the shops closure at 5pm; I thought I was going to die of boredom. As time went by, we decided that we would no longer endure the day-time touristic chaos and the evening urban desolation; hence, the move to the countryside. Much has changed since then; the contemporary Covid-induced emptiness contrasted with the 'gentrified' high-street life and the hubbub outside late-night entertainment venues constantly supervised by the police. Now, the city centre no longer offered entertainment; people were drawn to more secluded places and less frequented paths, like the footpaths leading to the university campus, now heavily populated. Long queues outside the supermarkets made me desist; it would be pointless anyway, I thought, to attempt any shopping until shelves were restocked. I could buy fresh products from local farm shops and did not need to buy antibacterial handwash or gel — I was using both long before the pandemic and had a sufficient supply at home together with bleach and various disinfectants. Besides, 'anti-

bacterial' products do not kill 'viruses', or do they? Perhaps simple good hygiene and common sense precautions would suffice.

In the following weeks, usually up at 5 am, I enjoyed watching the spring revival of nature. At dawn, I could hear the warble of blackbirds and thrushes and the chirping of goldfinches, blue tits and robins. From my window, I watched the magpies in flight displaying the silky colours of their plumage (black, blue, purple, metallic green) against the pure white of their belly. I saw again the Yaffle (the English folk-name for the green woodpecker) who, I suspect, resides locally but used to see rarely. This time, it was not just one; I counted four as they ventured into my courtyard to explore the flowerpots before flying to the nearby trees and disappear among the branches, while a kestrel hovered in mid-air over the hill. In the evening, a vixen and her two cubs regularly left their den to venture in the surrounding fields where lambs were grazing. The unusual warm weather was awaking nature earlier. The woodland was changing and by mid-April the undergrowth was already covered by a lilac-blue carpet of bluebells. The copper beeches began to boast their new red foliage, which would turn deep purple in the Summer and, then, bronze in the Autumn. Beyond the hedge, the local Nailbourne (a watercourse fed by underground sources) that had been dormant for many years was running again.

However, living in the countryside has its drawbacks. Now, more than ever, I was faced with the poor broadband service in the area which, with more people working from home, had worsened. Undoubtedly, ICT is useful in one's professional and social life, but it is unreliable as its applications can be easily abused — one thinks of the 'tracking' and 'surveillance' applications, or the technical glitches that can destroy files in a blink. Nevertheless, now I had to rely on them for virtual work meetings and other aspects of my rearranged daily routine.

Communication technologies have allowed me to stay in contact with my mother in Italy. She had not had time to get used to living alone after my father's death (aged 98) when Italy went into lockdown — they had spent 65 years together. Before I left in January, she was planning things to do on my next visit and promised to come to Kent in the Spring. Now, Covid-19 was disrupting our plans. We also realized that I might not be with her on her 90th birthday. Mother is still an energetic and independent woman, so she could take care of herself during the lockdown. She had resolved to stay at home on her own; she did not want to be a burden for my sister, who lives nearby, and only accepted that she should shop for her. However, being an extrovert, she would most likely miss human interactions. Most of all, I knew that she would miss her visits to the cemetery. She could not understand why cemeteries should have been closed; traffic wardens — now free from their duties — could have simply been redirected to patrol them, she suggested. Throughout, imagining how lonely her days would be, I have been constantly in contact with her. During our long conversations we talked about her daily routine and the books she was reading, and commented on the Covid-19 news and emergency measures. The restriction of movements, she said, reminded her of the *Confino* (confinement) enforced during fascism. Originally introduced in Italy in 1863 as a 'security and public order' measure, this 'legal' practice of controlling people's movement gradually became an instrument of social and political control, which the Fascist regime enforced with special zeal. It was abolished in

1965 because it was in contrast with the 'inviolability of personal freedom' pursuant to Art. 13 of the Italian Constitution. Mother was also suspicious of the government guidelines instructing doctors to 'prioritise' their medical care to those who had the best chance of survival. Governments were using the 'virus emergency' to get rid of pensioners, she conjectured, because they are regarded as an unproductive burden for the Treasury and the health service. I asked her about past pandemics, in particular the flu of the winter 1969-1970, known in Italy as 'Spaziale' (Space flu). As the Covid-19 death toll in Italy surged, an old TV reportage began to circulate on the internet about that flu, which had caused 20.000 deaths in Italy and 1 million in the world (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXIrGeh93IM). I did not recall any school closure but, given my young age at the time, my memory might not have been reliable. My mother did not remember any special emergency measure either.

The reportage on the Spaziale, titled *Cosa ci ha portato il Natale* (What Christmas brought us), was shot during the 1969 Christmas holidays. The voice-over described half-empty streets, offices and food markets; people shopped without wearing a face mask and walked without distancing while carrying bags full of gifts. Only nurses were pictured wearing surgical masks on the front pages of newspapers, which also reported that hospitals were full, the epidemic might last until January, and that several English hospitals had reached a critical point. The reportage quoted a say that circulated in the UK after World War II: 'When Mao sneezes, the world gets sick', implicitly referring to the fact that the flu epidemic had started in Hong Kong (at the time a British colony) in 1968, one year and a half before it hit Europe.

As feared, I missed my mother's birthday. I sent her flowers and we met on skype. My sisters and their families were with her — in Italy, restrictions of travelling across municipalities and regions had been lifted.

In the UK, the phased easing of the lockdown began four weeks later. Canterbury's residents gradually met in public places, many favouring the lawns of the Westgate gardens along the Stour river. The English have always loved picnicking. However, their attitude to shared public space seemed to have changed. Now, gathered in more or less big groups without social distancing, people were leaving behind empty boxes from take-away food, which attracted vermin. The rats that infest Canterbury's river banks during the Summer had become bolder and now circulated unafraid among pedestrians.

Guidelines for the post-lockdown phase were as ambiguous as the 'containment impositions'. When I could eventually travel to Italy in the Summer, the airline informed me that people had to wear disposable 'surgical' masks on all flights to Italy. Thus, my washable masks were no good. Then, I was asked to download and print (from the Italian government website) a five-page self-declaration form, and then fill it in and sign it. Two days before departure, I was informed that the form had changed (abridged to two pages) and I had to do the whole rigmarole again. In both cases, I had to answer questions that referred to Appendixes to the latest updates of an 'emergency decree'. I searched the internet and found the decree and the relevant Appendixes (in Italian) further referring to separate legislation. On departure and on arrival, nobody checked or enquired about the Form. On the plane, passengers and flight attendants wore all kinds of masks and passengers were allowed to remove them to eat and

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drink. There was no 'social distancing' between seats. For the return flight, I had to fill in an online form on the UK government site, then I was instructed to download the generated barcode on my mobile or print it. At the boarding gate, passengers were asked if they had done it. Now, we could all be 'traced'.

In Italy, during my Tuscan stay, people enjoyed their evening *passeggiata* (stroll) through crowed streets, often forgetting social distancing and with their face masks either in their hands or worn below the node or the chin, ready to be pulled up if necessary (face covering was mandatory in public places after 6 pm), to avoid being fined. In a sense, I felt sympathetic with ordinary Italians, for they had been inundated with contradictory rules and baffling guidelines, such as: 'walking is forbidden, but "motor activity" [movement involving walking or jogging] is allowed'; or 'swimming in the sea is allowed, but the use of the beach is forbidden'. More recently, the Minister for Education declared that 'students who have a temperature but are unaware of it must not use public transport to go to school' (sic!) and proposed to replace the double desks with single desks on wheels 'to facilitate distancing'.

In the UK, people have been encouraged to go out to 'help' the economy recover, while continuing social distancing. However, locally organised open-air events have often made social distancing impossible. Perplexing university polices are now in place, including a mixture of in-person and on-line activities, and tracking people's movement on campus.

Everywhere people wonder, 'what's coming next?'. Of course, people are aware of possible new peaks, but they do not seem convinced by the extended 'state of emergency' and the attendant containment measures, such as giving new powers to the police to invade citizens' home privacy. Meanwhile people also ask 'What has been done to prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed again?' It is not just new peaks of infection that loom on the horizon; Covid-19 and the more or less justified or induced fears are undoubtedly testing democracy.

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Subhadra Channa is a retired Professor of anthropology at the University of Delhi, Senior Vice-President of the IUAES and Chair of the Commission on Marginalization and Global Apartheid. She held a Charles Wallace Fellowship, U.K. and was Fulbright Lecturer (U.S.A., 2003 and 2008-2009). She has held Visiting Professorhis at the MSH (Paris, 2002), Salvador (Brazil, 2019), Kyoto University and the University of Kentucky. Channa was awarded the S. C. Roy Gold Medal (Asiatic Society) and the Distinguished Teacher Award (Delhi University, 2016). She has authored a large body of scholarly articles. Her books include *Gender in South Asia* (2013), *The Inner and Outer Selves: Cosmology, Gender, and Ecology in the Himalayas* (2013), *Gender, Livelihood and Environment* (ed. with Marilyn Porter, 2015) and *Life as a Dalit* (ed. with Joan P. Mencher, 2019). Professor Channa serves on the Board of *Urbanities*.

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Monica de Cesare is Head of two Operational Units at the University of Messina, dealing respectively with Higher Education and Teacher Training. After graduating in Political Sciences with an experimental dissertation in Sociology of Knowledge, she started working at the Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria. There, she also administered national and international projects. She has published with Rubettino (2002, 2003) and Mediterranea University Press (2004). In 2013, she moved to the University of Messina, where in 2016 she was appointed Deputy Head of the Erasmus Mobility Unit. In 2019, she gave a paper at the IUAES 2019 Inter-Congress in the Panel organized by the Commission on Urban Anthropology on 'Solidarities, the Need to Belong and Social Disruption'.

Judith N. DeSena, received her doctorate from the Graduate Center of The City University of New York. She is a professor of Sociology at St. John's University. Her work centres on community, neighbourhoods and gender studies. DeSena has authored *Protecting One's Turf* (1990 and 2005), and *People Power* (1999). She is editor of *Gender in an Urban World* (2008) and co-editor of *The World in Brooklyn* (2012). She has published various research articles on residential segregation, women's community activism and gendered space. Her latest books, *Gentrification and Inequality in Brooklyn* (2009) and *Race, Class, and Gentrification in Brooklyn* (with Jerome Krase) are analyses of gentrification and the dynamics it creates. Her latest two books, edited with Krase, investigate *Gentrification around the World.* Professor DeSena is a member of the International Urban Symposium-IUS.

Peter Jones received his M.Phil in history from the University of Leicester (1983). He is Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester. He has a broad body of research in social, cultural and political history. He has taught in schools, colleges of further education and universities. He has published *The 1848 Revolutions* (London, Longman, 2nd edition1991) and numerous articles on urban history particularly on urban élites; and a major study on corruption in Britain: *From Virtue to Venality: Corruption in the city* (Manchester University Press, 2013). He has been a regular contributor to the European Social Science History Conference and has edited a special edition of the *International Journal of Regional and Local History*: 'Urban Governance and its Disorders' (November 2019).

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