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A De Gruyter Social Sciences Pamphlet

12

perspectives on the pandemic

International social science thought leaders reflect on Covid-19

Introduction

All the way back in 2017, the World Health Organization said that social science interventions were not yet being used systematically in all health emergencies. Fast forward to 2020 and the coronavirus pandemic — this pamphlet is our modest attempt to redress that.

As I write, the world of government is taken up by public health measures throughout the globe. The news consists of pure Covid-19 pandemic updates. Non-essential travel within most countries has come to a standstill. A major global recession and possibly even a worldwide depression seem likely. Indeed, the planet has not seen such a fundamental change since the last world war.

Hyper-globalization may come to an abrupt end; countries are revisiting their healthcare provision; welfare systems are being reviewed; and many people are asking if we should go on as we have done before. As graffiti on an Italian wall aptly spells out: 'There can be no return to normal, as normal was the problem in the first place.'

Things will fundamentally change, but this change will need pause for reflection, space to consider new ideas and new ways of doing things.

This '12 Perspectives on the Pandemic' digital pamphlet provides a virtual space for social scientists to begin these very conversations, observe the zeitgeist, draw breath. It is an opportunity to read the reflections of some of the key influencers in this field as they analyse the effect of the virus on society.

The pieces in this publication are an overview of some of the major issues: a snapshot of social science thinking on past pandemics, the impact on health and tourism, the changing requirements of the welfare states. Fundamentally, how will the brave new post-Covid-19 world behave and what should or could it look like?

I hope you enjoy reading the pieces. This is only the beginning of the social science coronavirus debate, so please contact me if you would like to continue the conversation. Good health to everyone at this time.

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Bryan S. Turner

IS COVID-19 PART OF HISTORY'S ETERNAL DANCE MACABRE?

___ **From the plagues in Egypt to the Black Death, the Spanish flu and now Covid-19, the trail of human misery left by diseases and disasters has been intense. For a social scientist, what do these events mean for society and its future?**

Plagues have been the persistent companions of human communities for the entire history of homo erectus. Perhaps it is unsurprising, therefore, that together with natural disasters, they have evoked religious responses to calamity that bring into question the meaning of life and its injustice.

PLAGUES AND DISASTERS

In medieval times, the Wheel of Fortune symbolized the precarious nature of human existence. The angel of death was one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. We have graphic accounts of 10 plagues in Exodus. The most troublesome was the death of the first born in Exodus 11:4–6. This plague engulfed Egypt in response to the Pharaoh's unwise boast that he knew nothing of Yahweh.

The most demanding challenge to human notions about justice came with the Black Death in 1342 which killed an estimated 200 million. One response to this plague was the Dance Macabre which portrayed death as a sinister presence sitting on the backs of his victims. A familiar children's nursery rhyme — Ring a Ring o' Roses — allegedly describes the symptoms that attended the victims, such as boils under armpits and groins.

In modern history, the Spanish flu of 1918 killed up to 100 million people on the back of 20 million military and civilian

casualties from the Second World War.

What do these plagues and disasters have in common apart from the dry statistics? As a sociologist, two outcomes strike me as worthy of consideration.

DEFINING A GENERATION

My first observation is that we have detailed information about the distribution of fatalities by social class. In general terms, the poor and the disprivileged suffer disproportionality. However, of more interest is how catastrophic pandemics and crises came to define whole generations. By 'generation', I mean a cohort whose collective memory and sense of identity is defined by a shared event that changed their world. In modern history, we have the generation of the Great Depression, the 'disobedient generation' of the 1960s, and the generation of 9/11. What will characterize the mentality and imagination of the Covid-19 generation?

My second observation is that while the statistics of infections, recoveries and deaths are clearly important as scientific facts guiding social policy, people want more than statistics when the scale of the crisis calls out for a moral or religious response. Why me? Why us? Why now?

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

Answers to such questions are called theodicies — beliefs or ideologies that seek to explain the meaning of injustice and suffering.

"We now have ample statistical evidence regarding the spread and impact of Covid-19 in developed societies."

Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716) developed the idea of theodicy in response to the puzzle created by the idea of a loving, kind and just creator in the context of the devastating Lombardy floods in 1710. He proposed an optimistic solution: 'We live in the best of all possible worlds created by God', but his optimism was lampooned by Voltaire in 'Candide' (1759). The problem of theodicy was raised critically by the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 on All Saints' Day, destroying Lisbon and killing up to 100 thousand inhabitants. Catholic theologians saw it as a punishment of sinners. Rationalists were not convinced, but the problem of meaning would not go away.

We now have ample statistical evidence regarding the spread and impact of Covid-19 in developed societies. Statistical modelling will offer various projections. However, statistics are unlikely to make the coronavirus meaningful.

What is the meaning of 1,000 deaths in England in one day in April 2020? German sociologist Max Weber argued that science was unequal to the task of meaning-making.

I envisage two opposed theodicies — one religious, one political — emerging from Covid-19. During Easter 2020, especially in Catholic Europe, there was a clear sense of the suffering of Christ as a constitutive parable of human suffering. In the tradition of the Man of Sorrows, the wounds of Jesus have inspired artists to show his suffering as a representation of our vulnerability. Can this Christian image of suffering become a collective theodicy across cultures and religions?

ALIENATION AND ALTERNATIVES

There is a second, darker alternative in a secular theodicy. The economic and political crisis plays into the hands of far right militancy in which extreme ethno-nationalism addresses the alienation of 'the left-behind' and 'the deplorables' from liberal democracy. Radical political movements are therefore well served by Covid-19: close the borders, end immigration, send migrant workers home, defend national sovereignty, undermine international cooperation (UN, WHO, EU), reject multiculturalism and destroy the liberal state and its affluent elites.

Far-right militants fear the 'great displacement' whereby Muslims with high fertility rates will replace white populations. The far right wants a white baby boom after the pandemic fatalities. To achieve this demographic replacement, militants such as InCel (Involuntary Celibacy) want an end to feminism and women's rights, arguing that women should be in the home having babies and caring for their men. The drastic impact of the coronavirus on the populations of Spain, Italy and Greece adds fuel to the demand for male supremacy by militant political groups. This virus may be the covert mid-wife of authoritarian regimes.

The Wheel of Fortune is spinning once again and what will be next? The enclave society and the new nationalism?

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Ingrid Piller

COVID-19 FORCES US TO TAKE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY SERIOUSLY

▬ In a time of crisis like the current pandemic, how can we influence behaviour change and ensure international cooperation in a multilingual world? And can we learn lessons from the Chinese approach?

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the world with a joint action problem like never before: how do you get close to eight billion people to wash their hands and keep their distance?

Mass participation is critical to the success of prevention and containment efforts. The most effective way to achieve mass mobilization continues to be through state action. But the fact that there are only around 200 nation states in the world but over 6,000 languages raises a conundrum: how can we ensure that everyone has access to timely, high-quality information in their language?

For too long, state approaches to speakers of minority languages — whether indigenous or migrant — have ranged from benign neglect to forced assimilation. In order to gain access to the state and its institutions — education, health, welfare or the law — everyone was expected to speak the language of the state — English in the US, French in France, Mandarin in China, and so on. As a result of such monolingual approaches, Spanish speakers in the US, Arabic speakers in France, or dialect speakers in China have worse education, employment and health outcomes than their compatriots speaking the state language.

> **"Mass participation is critical to the success of prevention and containment efforts."**

The Covid-19 crisis has brought such linguistic inequalities to the forefront as language barriers may compromise the timeliness and the quality at which public health information is accessible to everyone in the population.

WHO AND THE US

The World Health Organization's dedicated information website on the novel coronavirus disease, for instance, is available in the six official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The information is directed at member states, who are tasked with localizing relevant information for their populations through their national health authorities.

States have taken a wide variety of approaches to the needs of their multilingual populations. Some states carry on with their staunchly monolingual communications unchanged. A White House directive to remove bilingual English-Spanish public health posters from US courtrooms is a case in point. Preliminary evidence from New York suggests that this approach has disastrous consequences for the Hispanic population, whose Covid-19 mortality rate far exceeds that of other groups. This comes as US health workers are left without adequate procedures and processes on how to deal with critically ill patients who do not speak English.

Putting measures for adequate multilingual communication in place during the height of an emergency of such proportions is next to impossible. Therefore, one of the many lessons we need to learn from this crisis is to include the reality of linguistic diversity into our normal procedures and processes, including disaster preparation.

IS CHINA LEADING THE WAY?

An example of a country that has started to learn that lesson is China. When the outbreak first started in Hubei province, medical assistance teams from all over China were confronted with the fact that Standard Chinese and local dialects are mutually unintelligible, despite the fiction of one single Chinese language long maintained by the Chinese state. In the face of the crisis, the monolingual ideology was ditched and within 48 hours, a team of linguists from Beijing Language and Culture University created a ['Guidebook of Wuhan Dialect for Medical Assistance Teams', 'Audio Materials of Wuhan Dialect for Medical Assistance Teams', and 'The Handbook of Doctor-Patient Communication'](). Plans are now underway to include the needs of linguistically diverse populations into all levels of the Chinese national emergency preparation, response, and recovery plan.

In the past, the linguistic disadvantage of minority speakers could be ignored by the mainstream. The Covid-19 crisis has

changed that. In a situation where the wellbeing of everyone depends on that of everyone else, ensuring equitable access to information irrespective of whether someone speaks the state language is in everyone's best interest.

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Gurminder K. Bhambra

COVID-19, EUROPE, INEQUALITY AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

—— **The inequalities that sit at the heart of our societies have been highlighted during the pandemic as borders close and countries heavily rely on foreign healthcare workers.**

From its emergence in Wuhan, China, the coronavirus spread around the world primarily carried in the lungs of the global elite and European travellers. 'Travel from and within Europe,' according to Joe Penney, 'preceded the first coronavirus cases in at least 93 countries across all five continents, accounting for more than half of the world's index cases.' The closing of national borders has been a common response by countries seeking to contain this spread. In the process, the inequalities that structure our world have been further revealed. These require urgent address.

TRAVERSING EUROPE

Europeans had travelled with ease, carrying the virus to many parts of Africa and Latin America, only now for their travel to be stopped. Europe itself has long been closed to the reciprocal movements of others — except, of course, those deemed to be high net worth or in some way useful to European societies, such as doctors, nurses and other medical staff.

Fortress Europe has been justified by scholars and commentators from across the political spectrum. They associate a projected demise of the welfare state with a rise in (racialized) inward migration, arguing that this has led to the breakdown of the national and class solidarities necessary for the maintenance of social welfare. As such, claims about 'white replacement' and questions about who is legitimately

entitled to a share in the wealth of European nations have come to play a major part in political debate across the continent, fuelling right-wing populism rather than answering it.

NATIONAL WEALTH?

Fundamental to these arguments is that the national patrimony available for distribution is precisely that — national. That is, it is wealth which has been generated through the activities of citizens over time and whose use and distribution ought to be regulated for 'the people' whose contributions and efforts it represents. It should not be available for 'invaders', to use the German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck's dispiriting term for those he considers outsiders.

> "Fundamental to these arguments is that the national patrimony available for distribution is precisely that — national."

That national patrimony, however, also derives from what Indian economist Utsa Patnaik calls a 'colonial drain' and the labour and taxes of the forebears of those seen as 'invaders'. Although presenting itself as a cosmopolitan continent of nations, Europe's history is, in fact, one of national projects buttressed by colonial endeavours of appropriation, coerced labour, and the repatriation of income.

Colonial settlement, involving the movement of populations, has been one of the most important ways in which Europeans have established structures of inequality across the globe. Across the nineteenth century, more than 60 million Europeans left their countries of origin to make new lives and livelihoods for themselves on lands inhabited by others. By the twenty-first century, most routes into Europe, for those displaced, dispossessed, and disenfranchised by Europeans, had been closed down.

The global inequalities and injustices that structure our world are a consequence of European (and US) colonial and imperial histories. These inequalities provoke some to choose to move rather than to stay in conditions of limited opportunities and despair. Those who are able to move most easily are those with skills in short supply in Europe.

Many European states are beginning to rely in greater numbers on foreign-trained and foreign-born doctors, nurses and medical staff to maintain the health of their national populations and healthcare systems. This amounts to a second 'colonial drain'.

ADDRESSING INEQUALITY

European states don't have to pay for the training of medical personnel at the same time as the poorer countries from which these doctors come lose vital expertise at home. This situation

will be exacerbated as Covid-19 spreads to Global South countries whose basic infrastructure is likely to be poorer as a consequence of historical colonial subjugation and whose trained medical personnel are now working in Global North countries.

I would question academia's failure to address colonial histories as constitutive of their societies and as constitutive of every aspect of their possibilities of being. Perhaps the explanation for this omission rests in the fact that colonialism directly led to the betterment of European societies at the expense of the lives, livelihoods and environments of others and people don't wish to reckon with the consequences of opening up this debate.

This asymmetry is starkly revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic and it requires ever more urgent address.

Europe is the wealthiest continent on the planet. Its wealth is an 'inheritance' that derives from the very same historical processes that have left other places impoverished. The only effective solution to issues of global inequality, and the only way to effectively address the pandemic, is to acknowledge and address these inequalities through forms of global reparative justice.

A properly critical social scientific analysis would offer us the possibility of better understanding our shared past so that we could more appropriately construct a world in which all of us could live well. As is commonly stated, the virus cannot be defeated nationally without also being defeated globally. If Europe is not willing to pay reparations as a matter of justice, perhaps it might nonetheless address the issue out of its own self-interest.

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Bent Greve

PREPARING WELFARE STATES IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

＿ How will our welfare states respond — and be forced to respond — to the economic effects of Covid-19? What will our healthcare systems of the future resemble?

The economies of all countries around the globe have been significantly pressured by the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. This is because many nations are now temporarily 'closed' in many ways, including on their borders. Fewer goods and services are sold, and large parts of the tourism industry, for example, have completely shut down.

This article mainly focuses on the more mature welfare states in Europe. Here, the rising level of unemployment has meant increased public sector spending. Of course, implied alongside this is a reduction in tax revenue due to the marked decrease in economic activity. This increases the government deficit and debt in many countries, similar to the financial crisis more than ten years ago. This might have a detrimental impact on the future of welfare states because of the need to pay interest and repay debt.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

The public sector deficit has increased, not only as result of higher levels of unemployment and less tax revenue, but also because in many countries there have been economic initiatives to mitigate the consequences of the crisis for both companies and workers. These have been sensible initiatives to prevent societies coming to a complete standstill, resulting in even more bankruptcies and unemployment.

It illustrates that there has been a paradigm shift in many countries, as the interventions in many ways can best be characterized as a classic Keynesian economic demand management strategy. The crisis has shown that while the market and the use of market mechanisms can do a lot, there are also situations where government intervention is needed to regulate and contribute to the functioning of the economy. Otherwise, human and socio-economic costs would be too high. Depending on how long the crisis lasts, the interventions will be needed for years. This will be especially true if international trade is restricted and if, for example, tourism in many countries takes a while to restart and then perhaps continues on a lower level for a number of years.

PREPARING OUR HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

At the same time as there is a higher burden on economies, there is also pressure on healthcare systems in all countries, and many have undoubtedly not been adequately prepared for a pandemic of this size. Therefore, in the coming years, in addition to the known factors that are pushing some healthcare costs upwards (such as change in demography, increase in expectations and new technology), money will also be needed in other essential areas. These include preparing the healthcare system for the possibility of similar situations reemerging and coping with those diseases less effectively treated during the peak of the crisis. Given what

we know about support for welfare states, these will be popular policies among voters for years to come.

It raises the question of how this will affect many other areas in the welfare states, such as caring for children and the elderly; education; and the level of a large number of income transfers (like unemployment and social assistance).

This is because if more money is to be spent on healthcare, without raising taxes and duties in most welfare states, it will be necessary to adjust spending in other areas. This is so since there must also be expected to be negative economic growth this year as well as the next year in a number of welfare states, and with negative economic growth, there will, with the same level of taxes and duties, be less money available for the welfare states. Countries with an already high level of government debt will also be pressured as they must borrow on the ordinary capital markets. They will risk having to pay a relatively high interest rate.

"If the welfare states want to continue historical levels of activity and spending, they might need to be willing to pay more in taxes and duties."

GOING FORWARD

If the welfare states want to continue historical levels of activity and spending, they might need to be willing to pay more in taxes and duties. This will be at least until the economies function again, the Covid-19 crisis is over, and there are resources available to expand the healthcare sector and maintain other parts of the welfare states.

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Jillian Rickly

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

—— After the immediate restrictions of Covid-19 on travel have been eased, the effects on tourism won't easily be lifted. When will tourists return and will this be in time to save the locations they normally flock to?

The impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry cannot be understated. The UN World Tourism Organization estimates a loss of US$300–450 billion in international tourism receipts, which equals nearly one third of the US$1.5 trillion generated globally. Despite swift actions by many governments around the world to protect travel service providers, refocus destination marketing campaigns, and even implement more sustainable management strategies, a larger unknown looms in the background — will tourists actually return? More precisely, when will they return, and will it be soon enough to save destination economies?

Notwithstanding the economic impact of lockdowns, and potentially high levels of unemployment and inflation long after they are eased (which will also infringe upon a person's ability to spend money on a holiday), Covid-19 demonstrates all too well the unpredictability of exogenous factors and their implications on tourist motivation and tourism demand.

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Exogenous factors are events that occur outside the control of the destination and affect tourism demand. These can be weather or geological events, such as the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. These brought destruction of tourism infrastructure, thereby reducing the supply-side ability to accommodate tourists, despite any

interest there might have been in visiting. Exogenous factors can also take the form of political upheaval and terrorism, such as the Arab Spring that began in 2011 or student protests in Hong Kong (in 2014, then again in 2019). While these events do not necessarily affect tourism infrastructure, they do negatively impact destination image, which results in reduced demand to visit these particular places. Most broadly, global economic downturns, such as the 2008 recession, can both suppress and defer demand around the world — many people were not financially able to take holidays, while those who did travel often chose less costly destinations.

As a result, exogenous factors affect demand via both constraints on travel and influences on motivation. At its simplest, motivation to travel is governed by both push and pull factors. Push factors are the reasons for wanting to get away from everyday life, such as stress or boredom, while pull factors are the destination attributes that attract interest and help potential tourists choose between specific locations. For example, museums might be an important pull factor for the history enthusiast, whereas the nature tourist might look for national parks. Thus, while motivation affects tourism demand, demand is the actual number of tourist arrivals to the destination.

However, Covid-19 is unlike anything that has come before. It began with advice not to visit particular destinations in

China in December 2019. Then there were warnings about attending large gatherings for Lunar New Year celebrations throughout Asia. This was followed by the first travel bans in the region, and subsequently full lockdowns and border closings in China. The rest of the world quickly followed suit.

"Ironically, when we perhaps most need a break, to get away from the stress of life, we are all stuck at home, dreaming of the holidays we hope to take once this is over."

The industry ground to a halt as all non-essential travel was suspended. Ironically, when we perhaps most need a break, to get away from the stress of life, we are all stuck at home, dreaming of the holidays we hope to take once this is over. However, it seems increasingly apparent this will be a very slow process.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As a result, it is very likely that the effects of Covid-19 on the tourism industry will linger long after lockdowns are eased. While the 2010 tsunami or the 2014 student protests were clearly defined events, uncertainty lingered in potential tourists' minds for years. Covid-19 is far more complicated and diffuse. It is a global pandemic. Our fears about specific locations cannot be so easily be assuaged by a new destination

marketing campaign. The health safety slogans, 'anyone can catch it, anyone can spread it', confirm that the entire journey is a risk — from the train to the airport, on the plane, at the resort, in the local restaurants and cafes — whether one travels to Spain or Bali.

The question of whether travel is safe will continue to act as an overarching constraint on the motivations of so many of us. While desperately wanting to get away for a holiday and being pulled toward the possibilities of so many destinations (likely to be begging tourists to return as soon as non-essential travel is permitted), the question will be, how many of us will see our motivations dampened by warnings of a second, third and even fourth wave of the virus looming in our collective future? This balancing act between push and pull factors of motivation and the uncertainty of the crisis will be worth watching. The tourism industry, destination economies and individual livelihoods will depend on how this balance unfolds.

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Dr Stéphanie Walsh Matthews

DON'T CONFUSE CONSTRAINTS WITH CONFINEMENT DURING COVID-19

——   Will the words we choose and the thought processes that accompany them help us through this crisis? Can we ever equate freedom with confinement or do we just need to shift our thinking?

There is no historical, species-specific evidence for being confined to an inside space and for limited interactions with others. However, a visitor from a distant future planet may look at some of our residential tower blocks or our current isolation measures and decide the opposite. However, we'd then need to put everything into context for them.

LANGUAGE AND EVOLUTION

A key evolutionary trait of our species, one that has promoted exceptional growth and dominion over this planet, has been our development of communication abilities. I am not referring to our current telecommunications — these are just a blip in the history of communicative advancements — but to language itself. This is a skill linked to several evolutionary events, such as bipedalism, which led to the lowering of the larynx and the use of the vocal tract to make meaningful sounds. In fact, human beings would not be particularly fascinating animals if it were not for their ability to express thoughts by sounds and scratches, and with these, to inspire, deceive, and control with words alone.

Why language? Before language, we were mere mammals. We lived in large groups, and these required strategies to alert, describe, and justify movements

"Paralleling the rise of language were all meaning-making systems that could signify to others what we adhered to, where we ranked, and what we feared."

to others; we did it with gestures and pre-vocal systems. But after language was developed, we quickly evolved from simple to complex utterances. Paralleling the rise of language were all meaning-making systems that could signify to others what we adhered to, where we ranked, and what we feared. The greater our elaboration of these systems, the more efficient we became at organizing ourselves and our world. The more we reaped from it the necessary resources, the more we thrived. Sedentary life became common place. Power structures seeped into our kinship systems, regulatory bodies, religions and institutions. Symbols and language allowed for efficiency of exchange. People were subjugated to the symbolic structures we erected. Regardless of our desire to stay put, and our acceptance to be under the governance of others and established ideas, we have always desired freedom, expressed unconsciously in our words which are symbols themselves. Humans are symbolic animals.

Constraints, however, are necessary evils since they provide the safety controls and reassurances we need: where we get food, how we can sleep without fear, how we protect others around us. Constraints seem to be the safeguard of predictability, which is — paradoxically — the shadow of freedom. So, in thousands of years' time, we can justify towers where up to 14 people may share a 700-ft2 space as some sign of freedom.

DOES FREEDOM EXIST?

Through our symbols, we can achieve a manipulation of meaning which, in turn, can be used to control how we perceive freedom. But, does freedom really exist, or is it merely a machination of the sense-producing machinery of the mind allowing for such Platonic follies to arise? Is it a distraction from suffering? Maybe so. Regardless of the 'whys' (our imposition of constraints in exchange for freedom), never in the heritage of acceptable structures were we, as humans, prepared to accept 'confinement' unless as punishment. Confinement is very different from constraint, which requires the employment of one's will. Confinement, by contrast, is imposition on another's will.

Foucault has been frequently cited recently to remind us of the dangers of false binary thinking, which may lead to a police state closing in. For me, his most important contribution to this debate is from his work 'Discipline and Punish' and is less about the panopticonic ideas emerging during a pandemic but more about the standards ushered in for punishment, i.e. prisons and their architecture. That is to say, the very space where people are confined for punishment. I will add that it is not so much the space itself, but rather, the confinement that the space signifies. Right now, confinement is starting to resemble what previously defined its opposite (paradoxically forming a binary system): safety, family, food, the home.

HOME AND SAFETY

Much is to be said about the importance of asserting more power centrally during difficult times, and why we can accept the good with the bad. But what we cannot accept, at least at the level of our bodies, is to begin seeing the home (the epicenter and the keeper of the species) as a space of confinement. This is what we find difficult, of course, for those of us who have the luxury to have a home — and one that we see as a safe place.

So, if you are struggling with doing your part and staying home, you are struggling with an ancient inner opposition — the refusal to equate freedom with confinement. As such, in semiotic turns, you must restructure the notion of confinement as related to present physical spaces, and locate it in the context of humanity as a whole. These are ideas we developed to protect ourselves, so let's use them to do so. Stay home. You are not confined … you are but merely constrained.

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Stephanie J. Nawyn

THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF PROTECTING REFUGEES DURING COVID-19

___ How do we protect refugees during the coronavirus pandemic? Can the field of 'humanitarian engineering' help us in this endeavour?

Whilst all groups of people are susceptible to the harm brought by SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid-19), some groups face greater risk than others. Many experts have labeled refugees as particularly vulnerable. Refugees are more likely to live under constraints that make it more difficult for them to access accurate information, protect themselves from infection, and receive medical treatment if they become infected.

"Refugees, whether they live in camps or in urban neighborhoods, frequently live in over-crowded conditions, sometimes with limited access to healthcare and proper sanitation."

MANAGING URBAN SETTINGS

Refugees, whether they live in camps or in urban neighborhoods, frequently live in over-crowded conditions, sometimes with limited access to healthcare and proper sanitation. While many people have images of refugee camps as places with squalid conditions and flimsy tents, worse conditions usually exist in urban settings, where the majority of the world's refugees live. Refugee camps are overseen by aid organizations or governments that locate and build shelters, distribute food and water, and provide services like education and medical treatment. Camps are organized to efficiently provide humanitarian help, even if the amount of help is inadequate. Those same provision of services are not

always available in urban settings, or they are not as easily distributed.

And because camps are closely managed, they can be closed, limiting who can enter the camp and thus restricting who might bring in infection. But there are fewer controls over movement into and within urban settings, and once community infection takes hold, it is extremely difficult to contain. Clean water may be difficult to access, electricity intermittent, and housing is often cramped. In those conditions, it is difficult for refugees to use proper sanitation like frequent hand washing, and social distancing is nearly impossible.

PROVIDING THE RIGHT INFORMATION

Providing refugees with accurate information is also challenging. Written communication needs to be translated into languages that they understand, and not everyone in a refugee community may be literate. In some settings, governments and aid agencies have relied on radio to communicate, but that can lead to multiple refugee house-holds gathering around a limited number of radios to hear news and instructions, which increases the chance of infection.

LEGAL LIMBO

Very few refugees are resettled permanently in a safe country. Most live in conditions of legal limbo in a country where they do not have citizenship; sometimes they may only have permission to remain in the country short-term. Whilst in that limbo, they are unable to fully access local job markets and healthcare services, and remain dependent upon aid agencies for material resources. During this pandemic, that often means volunteers helping aid agencies or acting on their own are no longer able to provide help, or in some cases, volunteers are a source of potential infection spread.

Policies towards refugees and asylum seekers have made conditions worse. Most governments have stepped up efforts to repel refugees and asylum seekers by increasing deportations, coercing refugees to 'voluntarily' return to their countries of origin, or forcing them to remain in low-income third 'safe' countries that often do not have the public health infrastructure to protect against spread of the disease. While governments have claimed that these policies are designed to protect against the spread of Covid-19 within their borders, infection from the native population can spread the virus to refugee populations, and through forcible return, those refugees take the infection to back to their home country or the 'safe' third country.

SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

These problems related to protecting refugees from Covid-19 are social problems. We know the importance of social distancing, but how do you maintain physical space between people at a water distribution center in a refugee camp? We know older people are more vulnerable to the virus, but how do you protect older refugees when they live in multi-generational households in overcrowded urban slums? We know hand washing can reduce the spread of the disease, but how do you ensure that refugee children have soap when supply transports to remote refugee camps are disrupted because of the pandemic? In other words, we already know the medical science behind the need for hygiene, and we know the engineering necessary for constructing physical spaces that allow for social distancing, but we still need social scientists to examine the conditions of refugees' lives and explore solutions to the barriers that are keeping refugees from being safe and healthy.

HUMANITARIAN ENGINEERING

A field that has recently emerged to provide these solutions is 'humanitarian engineering.' It combines such fields as sociology, political science, economics, and history with engineering and public health to provide solutions to humanitarian problems. It centers human and community welfare within the goals of designing and building

infrastructure, rather than focusing only on mechanical or biomedical aspects. Humanitarian engineering has married social sciences with physical and biological sciences to address a range of intractable problems in humanitarian intervention, and it will be increasingly important as we address the particular vulnerabilities of refugees to this pandemic.

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#8

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Deborah Lupton

THE NEED FOR URGENT SOCIAL RESEARCH IN A COVID-19 SOCIETY

—— Social research is urgently needed to detail people's experiences of life during the pandemic, how different countries and governments are responding to the crisis and what social changes are happening.

We are now living in a 'Covid society', the long-term effects of which have yet to be experienced or imagined. Everything has shifted. All social research, whether it is directly focusing on the pandemic or not, is also now inevitably changed.

HISTORICAL HEALTH CRISES

I have been studying the social aspects of health and medicine for my entire career. Among many other health-related topics, I have conducted research on two major global health issues that received major policy and public health as well as mass media attention. The first was the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which emerged in the early 1980s. The second was the so-called 'obesity epidemic', sparked by public health announcements and mass media reporting in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s. It proposed that levels of 'obesity' were rising dramatically worldwide, accompanied by major health problems. HIV/AIDS and the obesity crisis generated an enormous research momentum among not only social researchers but also social activists, community groups and artists, all of whom played a vital role in helping to understand the social, cultural, psychological and political consequences and impacts of these phenomena.

Now the Covid-19 pandemic has erupted, affecting all regions of the world, and the news media are dominated by reporting developments and effects. At the time of writing,

more than 100 thousand lives have already been lost world-wide, and many healthcare systems are straining under the burden of caring for unprecedented numbers of seriously ill patients with pneumonia. Everyday lives have been disrupted: schools and workplaces are closed; many people have lost their jobs; vast populations have been confined to their homes; people are cut off from face-to-face interactions and worried about their own health or those of their family members.

> **"The current pandemic shares some features of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and obesity crisis, but there are many differences as well."**

SOCIAL RESEARCH FOR COVID-19

Social research is again urgently needed to document people's experiences of living in this moment, how different countries and governments are addressing the pandemic and what social changes are occurring now or will be happening in the post-Covid world. Social researchers need to be contributing to understandings how people have been affected by living in the pandemic, both physically and mentally, and what measures and policies have been most effective and helpful.

The current pandemic shares some features of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and obesity crisis, but there are many differences

as well. All three health crises received worldwide media attention and affected many countries. All have involved the identification of social groups deemed both 'most at risk' and 'risky to others', accompanied by scapegoating, victim-blaming, stigmatization, marginalization and neglect. These groups have differed across the health crises themselves, but also changed over time for each health crisis.

All three crises are intensely political, involving claims and counter-claims about authoritative knowledge, whose advice should be trusted and the best way to inform and manage the public and 'at risk/risky' groups. The HIV/AIDS and obesity crises have also involved developing innovative grassroots support systems and activist networks that have played a major role in supporting 'at-risk/risky groups', countering stigma and marginalization and generating and sharing citizen-led knowledge. There is already evidence of these systems and networks emerging in response to the current threat.

DIFFERENCES AND DISTANCING

The Covid pandemic differs in many crucial ways from these crises, however. One difference is the sheer scope and rapid expansion of its effects beyond the health-related impacts. Covid-19 is a truly global health problem that erupted and spread extremely quickly, meaning there was little time to make sense of it and respond adequately. Another key

difference is the economic and other social effects beyond the immediate health effects of contracting or passing on the virus. The quarantining, social isolation and physical distancing measures required to limit the rate of spread of Covid-19 (SARS-Cov-2) have suddenly and unexpectedly made millions of people unemployed and in dire straits financially in most parts of the world.

DIGITAL MEDIA

A third major difference is that digital media and devices are playing a far more crucial role in this pandemic compared with the other crises, when the internet, mobile devices and social media either did not exist or were in their infancy. We have already seen how social media has contributed to the spread of misinformation and panic but has also played a crucial role in helping people deal with the impact of physical isolation by offering mediated forms of social connection that have alleviated boredom and loneliness.

Social research will generate better understandings not only of the current social impact of Covid-19, but also continuing or new impacts into the future. Findings will have immediate and long-term applications for contributing to policy and service delivery and development to better support people as they deal with and recover from the myriad challenges they are experiencing to their ways of life and health status.

They will also offer ways forward for how to deal with and manage new large-scale health crises in ethical and effective ways.

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Monika Büscher

A GREAT MOBILITY TRANSFORMATION

— If the coronavirus has meant less air pollution, an increase in cycling and walking in some areas and an upsurge in birds singing in the trees, why isn't anyone talking about the effects of this huge change?

There are no passenger flights, the streets are filled with bird-song, in some countries [walking and cycling have increased by 90%](#), and the air is clear: a silver lining at a time of great tragedy. In fact, the mass (im)mobilisation of Covid-19 is set to enable the [largest ever worldwide reduction in carbon emissions](#). However, so far, the response to the pandemic has at best been to ignore this astounding achievement, at worst, it has sought to reverse it. Why? How could it be otherwise?

KARL POLANYI AND THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIETY

Covid-19 is [not the cause of the crisis, it is a symptom](#). Hypermobility, the marketisation of healthcare, decades of disinvestment in resilience, inequality and the growth of precarious work worldwide have all created perfect conditions for viral spread. Alongside dependence on fossil fuel and insatiable consumption, they are also implicated in the much deeper crises of climate change and environmental destruction. These energetic political, and economic origins of our time, captured by economic historian Karl Polanyi as the mechanisms of 'The Great Transformation' (1944), spell collapse.

Writing in exile during the Second World War, Polanyi fore-saw that 'to allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment …

would result in the demolition of society' (p. 76). Against the odds, societies now are rallying for survival. As governments

> "Refugees, whether they live in camps or in urban neighborhoods, frequently live in over-crowded conditions, sometimes with limited access to healthcare and proper sanitation."

articulate responses to the pandemic, even conservatives acknowledge that everything is connected. This has brought back the state, with its inter-vention in how people live their lives, run their businesses, support their employees. Such interventions are part of good governance in crisis and enable powerful leadership in wrestling the systemness of epidemiology, economy, and everyday life. More and more globally coordinated intervention is likely to be necessary to address climate change and environmental crises.

Changing mobility systems of transport, consumption, finance and information in response to Covid-19 has been a matter of banning all but essential travel, protecting workers, blocking sales of non-essentials, borrowing billions to support struggling individuals and businesses as well as developing countries, and prompting Facebook to implement fact-checking. This has made possible an unprecedented reduction in carbon emissions, and that could be for good.

LIVING VIRTUALLY

Changes in everyday living are translating alternative concepts of commoning mobility, mobility justice, drift economies, virtual travel and mobile publics into the fabric of society. Virtual forms of travel for work, socialising, e-commerce, and learning, in particular, are driving a digital transformation. Before Covid-19, about 3% of US citizens regularly worked from home. Now business analysts estimate that 25–30% of the workforce will do so by the end of 2021.

These changes inspire optimism. But mobilities research shows how digital travel does not just substitute for physical journeys, but may, in fact, increase physical travel. The new mobility patterns are temporary and soon potentially subject to intense surveillant contact tracing, threatening civil liberties. At the same time, there is talk that 'the real post-coronavirus challenge will be how to shrink the state', coupled with determined efforts to 'reopen economies' with demand stimulus packages, billion dollar bailouts and weakened environmental constraints for fossil fuel corporations. These measures could waste a precious opportunity to stop business as usual.

REDUCING EMISSIONS

To meet the 1.5° carbon reduction targets set in Paris, the 2019 UN Emissions Gap Report shows that emissions must

drop by 7.6 % every year this decade. Covid-19 has made the impossible possible and given us a 4% reduction head start for 2020, together with a sobering sense of the enormity of the challenge. Unprecedented state intervention and new economic, social, and cultural practices have been mobilised to make this happen, inspired by a deep sense of crisis. What does it take to stretch this powerful humanity shown by political leaders and members of the public alike to address the threat to survival that the climate and environmental crises pose?

Air pollution currently kills seven million people annually. From 2030, climate change is estimated to cause 250,000 additional deaths per year (WHO). The World Bank projects that climate impacts could push 100 million more people into poverty, and internally displace 143 million. These crises are accompanied by a 'new barbarism' of xenophobia, inequality, poverty, and discrimination, as well as the ecological tragedy of a sixth mass extinction.

CHOOSING OUR FUTURE

We are in the midst of societal transformation, hurtling down two very separate forks in the road ahead. The future we choose now matters vitally. On one side, people are racing to deepen Polanyi's first great transformation, clamouring for a return to normal, propping up fossil fuel extraction and air

travel, inciting competition and tolerating the collapse of developing nations. On the other, people are realising that enough is enough, supporting vital societal services, the importance of state intervention, global collaboration and less physical and more virtual mobility. By acting on our new visceral understanding that everything can collapse, and how the future is now, as John Urry puts it, we have a unique opportunity to make the current mobility transformation the beginning of a new, great transformation that is good for humanity and for the planet.

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Anthony Elliott

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Anthony Elliott

WHAT FUTURE FOR POST-CORONAVIRUS SOCIETIES?

___ There has been great speed to predict our post-Covid-19 future. What is clearer, however, is that institutions and individuals across the globe have already creatively responded to huge challenges to reshape social activities and everyday lives.

In a remarkably short amount of time, Covid-19 has unleashed gripping fears, uncertainties and risks the world over, which is testing social cohesion and globalization to its core. People today are living in a way they never have before — working from home, learning online and exercising outdoors, and many are experimenting in the design of their identities. All of this leads to a fundamental question: will post-coronavirus life be significantly different to life before this global pandemic?

PEAK GLOBALIZATION

In a recent article, 'Why this crisis is a turning point in history', the political theorist John Gray equates Covid-19 with the demise of what he terms 'peak globalization'. Gray argues that, as the virus has gone global, so globalization itself has ultimately come unstuck:

'*The era of peak globalization is over. An economic system that relied on worldwide production and long supply chains is morphing into one that will be less interconnected. A way of life driven by unceasing mobility is shuddering to a stop. Our lives are going to be more physically constrained and more virtual than they were. A more fragmented world is coming into being that in some ways may be more resilient.*'

These are important and interesting claims, but I disagree with each of them. Let me briefly say why.

Gray's diagnosis only holds good if globalization is viewed solely as an economic phenomenon. But such an understanding is not so much incorrect as incomplete. Globalization is not only economic in conditions and outcomes, but also social, cultural, political and historical to its roots. Global pandemics, for instance, arguably change the dynamics of globalization. But it is important to see that, in many respects, the world remains highly interconnected.

> **"Covid-19 looks different from anything we've witnessed before and — due to the forces of globalization — has spread everywhere."**

GLOBALIZING DYNAMICS

Coronavirus is a prime expression of our super-global world. Covid-19 looks different from anything we've witnessed before and — due to the forces of globalization — has spread everywhere. Yet, again due to complex globalizing dynamics, the very global nature of Covid-19 means that scientists cooperate worldwide in the search for effective vaccinations or antidotes. In this way, globalization is both a condition and consequence of the virus. Ironically, the very global forces that unleashed this worldwide pandemic are also deeply implicated in its possible eradication.

But, still, the thorny issue remains: what might be the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on our lives and our lives in future times?

There are two key dimensions to addressing this question. The first is institutional, centred on organizational change. The second is cultural, centred on lifestyle change.

At the level of organizations, the virus has arguably accelerated tendencies resulting from the digital revolution which were already well underway throughout the rich north. Faced with government directives concerning social distancing, the central response from industry and enterprise has been to shift many core activities into cyberspace. Offices, schools, universities and other work centres have moved from face-to-face to digital interaction.

VIRTUAL WORKSTATIONS

Now that the genie has been let out of the bottle, the very definition of work and employment is likely to change permanently. Working from home, or remote working, is unlikely in the future to revert to the 'second-best' option. The virtual workstations set up by employees during the pandemic have enabled people to work efficiently and in a way that many had not previously enjoyed.

These innovations are also evident in healthcare. With telemedicine ramped up to provide healthcare remotely by general practitioners during Covid-19, it is surely unlikely to be dumped when the world eventually recovers. Nor is the restaurant industry likely to look the same after the virus subsides. Restaurants have been among the hardest-hit businesses in the pandemic, and a post-Covid-19 world will need to find inventive ways for customers to feel safe. This might include measures such as increased spacing between customers and minimizing human contact through, for example, digital ordering and payment.

DIGITAL SOCIAL LIVES

What holds for institutions also holds for individuals. Lifestyle change, just like organizational change, has been raised to the second power during Covid-19. From digital dinner parties to Facebook funerals, women and men have been trying out and trying on novel social experiments. From this angle, we can say that coronavirus-enforced quarantine has persuaded people to develop different lifestyle choices — many of which will continue to impact upon social relationships, or jostle uneasily alongside more traditional ways of doing things.

There has been too much rush to predict the post-coronavirus future. What the virus has shown, however, is that

institutions and individuals have imaginatively responded to immense challenges to reshape social activities and, as a result, reinvent their lives. How this plays out in the future, and under what scenarios, now falls to the social sciences for further elucidation.

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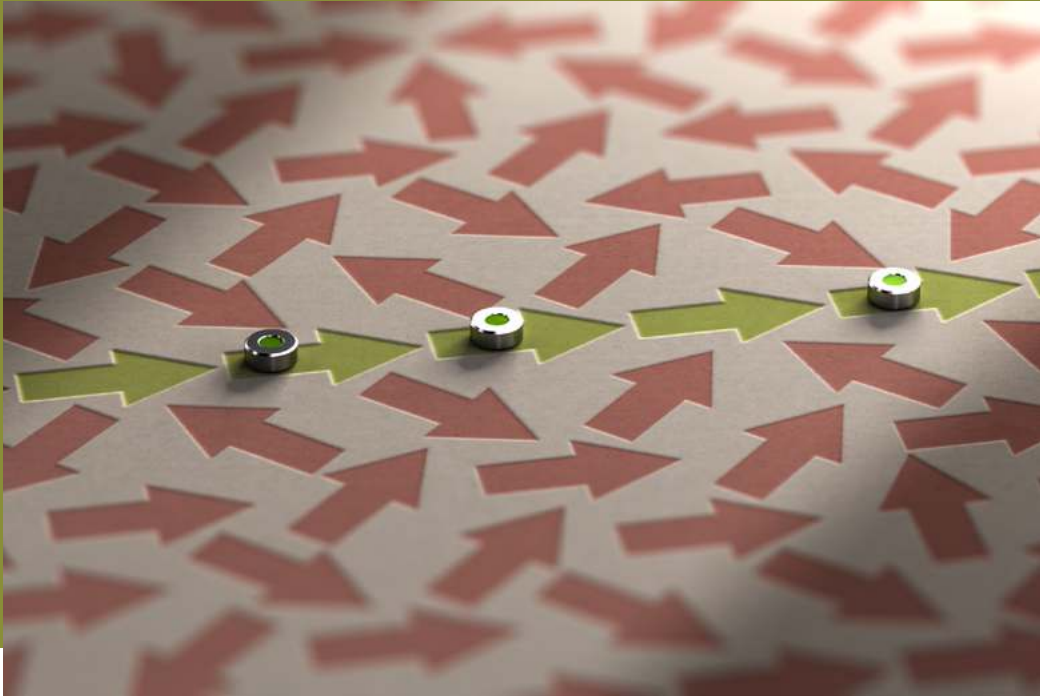
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Dr Sharon Varney

Sharon has deep expertise working in large, complex
organisations. Her award-winning doctoral research,
which has a very practical edge, explored the complex
dynamics of organisational change and the role of
change leaders within it.

Dr Sharon Varney

ENGAGING WITH COMPLEXITY — IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

⎯ In a period of uncertainty will 'complexity science' lead the way in helping us make sense of the the constantly shifting adjustments people make in the natural cycle of the world?

This Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly unleashed a tsunami of complexity and uncertainty. In the midst of it all, political and business leaders are under intense pressure to make their leadership count. But old narratives of certainty won't work. We must bring complexity science, the science of uncertainty, out of the shadows and use it to inform leadership practice. If not now, when?

COMPLEXITY SCIENCE, THE SCIENCE OF UNCERTAINTY

Complexity science is the science of uncertainty. It helps us understand how the world, and the social world, really works. It reveals that far from being stable and certain, the familiar patterns of everyday life are continually recreated. What creates that sense of stability is a multitude of small adjustments that people make to one another, and to the physical world, every minute of every day.

Over time, complex social systems tend to become more entangled. Interdependencies mean that effects can spread rapidly across a system. Increasing globalization, fuelled by the ease of travel and the power of technology, has created intricate interdependencies between countries. We have seen the effects of that entanglement in the rapid, global spread of the Covid-19 virus. We have seen it in the fast, worldwide spread of information, from scientific evidence to wild rumours.

Uncertainty abounds. What is known, clinically and behaviourally, is completely dwarfed by the unknown. We do not and cannot yet know how this pandemic will play out. We do not know whether life will return, in time, to a more familiar pattern, or whether it will be irrevocably changed in fundamental ways.

ACTION AMIDST UNCERTAINTY

Yet, we must take action. Amidst unprecedented uncertainty, individuals must make practical decisions about their day-to-day behaviour and how they live their daily lives. Business leaders must make decisions about their organization's policies and practices. Political leaders must make decisions about national policies and how best to gain compliance.

IN CHARGE, BUT NOT IN CONTROL

Formal leaders remain in charge of businesses and public policy, while being in the midst of complexity and change, with scant information. They are under intense scrutiny as people seek certainty in an increasingly uncertain environment, so what they say and do, including failing to say and do anything, really matters. It is abundantly clear that formal leaders are on the receiving end of changing public opinion and emergent patterns of behaviour, as well as decisions made in other domains. They remain in charge when they cannot

either predict or control what happens.

WHAT LEADERS DO AND SAY MATTERS

This does not mean 'anything goes'. Far from it. Our new normal is emerging unpredictably right now. So, action, including inaction, really matters. It is the very stuff of emergence.

In a changing world, we cannot rely on the shorthand of habit. We must rethink the consequences of action and inaction. Keeping our lives on a familiar track requires us to rethink and adjust many things that we took for granted just days ago. Instead of reacting quickly and automatically, we must continually recalibrate our normal repertoire of responses, to rethink their consequences, and actively choose the best we can for the changing circumstances. We must stay alert to and to search for new and creative ways to keep things going, as the world changes, and as our actions collectively change the world. This moves us from fast, automatic thinking to slower, deliberate thinking which increases our cognitive load. Added to that, many of us are feeling a greater emotional burden, often negative, such as worry, anxiety, fear, guilt and more. It is emotionally as well as cognitively exhausting.

> "It is time for those who are in charge in organizations and governments to take complexity science insights seriously."

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Over the last 25 years, complexity science research in business and management has made significant progress. While there are no simple answers, we know a lot to help leaders make informed leadership choices. In the past, complexity science messages about remaining in charge without being in control, permanent uncertainty, change and interdependencies have proved too radical, too unpalatable for the mainstream. Now they seem only too obvious.

It is time for those who are in charge in organizations and governments to take complexity science insights seriously. If not now, when?

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Robert van Krieken

COVID-19 AND THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

—— **What are the long-term processes within which the emergence of Covid-19 are fixed? Are infectious diseases a central feature of the civilizing process and how can the form taken by this process help to improve control over those diseases?**

Three fishermen are caught in a particularly powerful maelstrom. Only one survives: he keeps a cool enough head to notice that smaller, cylindrical objects get sucked down much more slowly, so he lashes himself to a cask and lives to tell the tale. The sociologist Norbert Elias used this short story by Edgar Allen Poe to illustrate the importance of intellectual but also emotional detachment in thinking about the world around us, especially, when things appear threatening.

PANDEMICS AND LONG-TERM PROCESSES

Elias's approach to sociology suggests important questions that could help us navigate through the maelstrom that is the Covid-19 pandemic. He is best known for his arguments concerning how human 'civilization' should be understood: as a long-term process of ever-lengthening chains of interdependence binding people together in constantly shifting power relations. In that process, the relationships between humans and the non-human environment needs to be seen alongside their relationships with each other, and themselves. He shared the view held by other early sociologists that social relations, structures and processes are closely tied to people's psychological and emotional dispositions and orientations: their habitus.

This approach leads to the following questions. Firstly, what are the long-term processes — in social relations and

in relations between humans and the non-human world — within which the emergence of Covid-19 are embedded? Most analyses of pandemics agree that they are closely tied to ongoing processes of change and transformation moving in particular directions. The list of things that are increasing, expanding, intensifying and becoming more complex includes population density, humans' proximity to each other and to the animal world, and the resistance of carriers of bacteria and viruses to pesticides.

"Elias's approach to sociology suggests important questions that could help navigate through the maelstrom that is the Covid-19 pandemic."

CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF LIFE

A second question would be whether infectious diseases are a central feature of the civilizing process and in what ways can the form taken by this process help to improve control over those diseases? It is precisely increased human control over — read, intrusion into — the non-human world and increasing global interdependence that creates the conditions for the emergence and mutation of bacteria and viruses. Infectious disease has been 'one of the fundamental parameters and determinants of human history' (McNeill 1998, p. 295), the greatest single cause of death around the world, killing more individuals than wars, and possibly the

most important force behind the impact of colonialism. With increased control comes increased dependence and vulnerability. As William McNeill wrote in 1997, 'the way infectious diseases have begun to come back shows that we remain caught in the web of life — permanently and irretrievably — no matter how clever we are at altering what we do not like, or how successful we become at displacing other species' (p. 17). Clearly similar points can also be made about industrial capitalism, energy consumption and global warming. One could argue that, in the absence of sufficient awareness of this dimension of civilizing processes, it runs the danger of being increasingly vulnerable to catastrophes like pandemics. This then makes control over the natural world itself what needs to be controlled, requiring a form of meta-control or meta-civilizing process.

TRANSFORMING OURSELVES

Third, what aspects of existing human habitus have contributed to the pandemic, and what changes in habitus might result? Activities like being able to travel the world, attend sporting events and concerts, or visit densely-packed places of worship, restaurants, cinemas, beaches, pubs and cafes, have become central to many people's sense of being a worthwhile human being. Many parts of the world remain too poor to see themselves this way, but it is an orientation to the world that has been gradually expanding its reach.

Our relationship to the non-human world is closely tied to our relationship to ourselves: as Elias put it, 'by transforming nature people transform themselves' (2007 [1987], p. 177). The measures advocated by public health experts require a certain kind of habitus and emotional disposition, a particular transformation of the kind of person we are as well as our relations with others.

Importantly, for Elias — although in relation to public health this idea was most clearly expressed by the Dutch scholar Johan Goudsblom (1986) — the process of civilization has a momentum and force that is independent of the organized response to particular events like pandemics or to other public health problems. Covid-19 needs to be placed in the context of already-existing social structures, dynamics and processes, some of which the pandemic will accelerate or become accentuated over others. From Elias's perspective, the measures that have been advocated by public health experts since the 1970s, both short- and long-term, 'stand for' or 'represent' a more generalized capacity for self-restraint, a shaping of habitus in a particular direction that has more to do with the structure and dynamics of social relations more broadly — particularly our relation to the non-human world — than the 'solution' to a specific public health problem.

This pandemic appears to be exerting a compulsion to face with sober senses our real conditions of life, and our relations with each other, with varying degrees of success, and engaging with these kinds of questions about the place of the pandemic in the long-term process of civilization provides a useful conceptual springboard for those reflections.

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