Research ethics, violated

Magnus Fiskesjö
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Recently on a scholar's email listserv dealing with Myanmar (Burma) issues, I learned that at some universities in Australia, Singapore, and beyond, scholars intent on doing work in Myanmar (Burma) are now — believe it or not — forced by their own universities to show that they obtained permission from the Myanmar government for their research, *not* because Myanmar's government insists on it, but because ethics offices at their own universities demand it — in effect giving a veto over the research to the Myanmar government.

This is puzzling, and raises interesting questions. The Myanmar government is, of

course, being charged with genocide at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. The long years of increasing discrimination and persecution against Myanmar's Rohingya minority made Myanmar lead the world in making people stateless; created refugee flows to neighboring countries, and dismal IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps inside Myanmar itself. Then, in August 2017, the country's military launched a massive violent campaign, burning Rohingya villages and driving inhabitants out at gunpoint, killing many as they went. Massive refugee camps in Bangladesh are now becoming permanent, as Myanmar refuses to guarantee the citizenship and security of anyone that would return home. These crimes have been widely documented, and this forms the basis of the genocide charge brought against Myanmar the country, which now tries to defend itself through its civilian government, which is unrepentant and in denial, while persistently blocking access for impartial observers. But the ICJ issued an unanimous injunction to Myanmar to cease the persecution, which was thereby confirmed, while the adjudication of whether it legally constitutes genocide is proceeding.

> *The Myanmar government is thus clearly in breach of ethics. It is curious that ethics committees at other countries' universities would demand that researchers should get approval from the same government.*

What could be the purpose of such a procedure — would it be anything more than a pointless, bureaucratic home-turf kabuki show about ethics, an empty performance which probably itself is really both unethical and harmful?

Research should be ethical, but unethical governments should not be given a veto to kill the research. The same must be said for research in, for example, China, and other such places. We all know that China's economic power is the only reason it isn't also in international genocide court, over its mass racial profiling system, mass concentration camps, and extermination of Uyghur and other indigenous cultures in Western China also ongoing right now. (I can even sympathize with those who feel it is not fair to single out Myanmar while

overlooking China, where the state's crimes against humanity are on an even larger scale.)

The point is, such governments (Myanmar, China, etc.) should not have an ethics veto over specific research plans designed by scholars who are pursuing the freedom of inquiry promised by their universities — originally set up to further just this sort of inquiry.

Yes, given that the world belongs to nation-states, asking permission to enter the country is unavoidable — but there is no reason to subject researchers to detailed scrutiny of their plans by the host government. Ethics is necessary, but in my view, where the destination country has a government responsible for mass ethical violations, the home university should instead allow scholars to justify the ethical quality of their research plans directly to their university's ethics committee, and not have it depend on an OK from the government in question.

Worst of all, if scholars are forced to report their interviewees to the government, they may be persecuted. How ethical is that outcome?

> *I am not saying we should not ask for permission. But who do we ask? We can ask for the informed consent of those we talk to, the appropriate locals, not necessarily the central government.*

Remember the American anthropologist David Schneider who insisted on asking permission from the chief of the Pacific island of Yap for his ethnographic fieldwork there. It was granted with a big laugh, with the chief pointing to the armada of American warships anchored in plain view just off the island (Schneider and Handler 1995; cf. Fiskesjö 2013). The United States obviously had the means to force the Yapese to accept an intrusive American researcher. So everyone thought Schneider's lone request for permission for investigations was very funny. Yet Schneider's move established something important: Even under circumstances of domination, as an ethnographer one must respect both the locals *and* one's own autonomy as a researcher, not just for bureaucratic show,

but as a matter of principle. For an anthropologist like Schneider to ask the chief, important as the gesture may have been, still could not be more than the *starting point* of the negotiations of the myriad ethical issues that inevitably would arise in this new social setting, *after* this first beginning, and which would inevitably include innumerable decisions on everyday ethics, on his part. (Do you talk to that little girl over there? Is it appropriate? How? When?)

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Every fieldworker knows this, and the inevitable implication that everyone must take responsibility for their own ethical decisions, which can't be pre-scripted, but depends on the "there and then."

This also highlights the divergence between anthropological fieldwork as a never-ending process of mutual negotiation and learning that can never be divorced from ethics (as it always was, from the beginning of "fieldwork" — e.g. Godfrey Lienhardt's example; Schmidt 2017), and on the other hand, the legalistic

institutional ethics framework particularly in US universities, based in medical science, where obtaining the signature on a form is often conceived as finalizing consent (Metro 2014).

> *This setup suggests consent is like movie rights, signed away by the research subject.*

And this sure is one reason "local people everywhere feel betrayed by anthropology," as Gabriela Vargas-Cetina put it (2013, 1).

All anthropology in the US, and in many other countries too, is shoehorned into this kind of setup, which in the US is inherited from a biomedical framework — even though the authors of the foundational Belmont report saw clearly that another, different assessment would have to be done for the social sciences which are different from biomedical research. Yet this never happened (cf. *American Ethnologist* 2006).

I am lucky that at my own university, the Institutional Review Bureau and its human subjects ethics review committee does understand that people in other places may be illiterate, and may well have their own cultural understanding of consent that may differs dramatically from the US/Hollywood understanding. But at other schools, the process is controlled by lawyers who'll not hesitate to destroy a fieldwork project if it does not conform. In some places, it's the end of fieldwork.

No doubt those universities in Australia and Singapore and other places who will give a veto over research to genocidal governments like Myanmar's and China's, are also preventing some good research from ever taking place, because it did not suit the bureaucrats over there.

This is already awful. But I'd like to take the opportunity to end by pointing out there is an even more lethal flaw in the whole IRB/human subjects ethics system. It, too, stems from the culturally particular biomedical and legalistic framework in

which these review processes originated. I am talking about how this system left out the need to study the bad guys — not just human subjects who supposedly sit there and wait for us, and nicely give their consent in good order, so we can proceed with either injecting them with a trial drug, or ask them pre-approved survey questions.

> *What about the mafia, the vigilantes, the army officers and soldiers, the Communist Party officials, the concentration camp jailers, and so on: We must study them, too; but they will not sign your university-approved consent form.*

The current IRB procedures do allow for deceit, but only the hidden deceit built into psychological lab experiments, and so on. But the bad guys are not going to sit down and answer survey questions. They will not let you in; they will block you, or stop you or even harm you.

Yet we do need to know what drives them. Research is about figuring the world out so we can make it better. The current ethics setup risks becoming a recipe for abandoning necessary research on the evils of this world, just because we fetishize "consent" in dubious ways which end up having us dodge the ethics, instead of upholding it, which was the goal to begin with!

Scholars need to ask themselves again if we should perhaps emulate the "Wallraffing" under-cover methods of journalists like the heroic Günther Wallraff, whose famous, lengthy ethnographic-style investigations into various bad guys have typically been carried out in disguise, by pretending to be somebody else.

Wallraff certainly does not grant the bad guys an automatic veto to shut down an ethical quest for the hidden truths which it is ethical to figure out, and expose.

Now, embedding in disguise with Myanmar soldiers in Rakhine, to reveal their methods of village burning and ethnic cleansing, or, signing up as a concentration camp guard in Xinjiang to reveal and analyze the violence against camp detainees, would probably be unsafe, or even impossible to do. But this world is

full of injustice that cries out for research, and the current research ethics system needs a rethink. Let's begin by abolishing the Myanmar government's veto on research plans.

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Muslim NGOs Facing COVID-19 in France

Lucas Faure
May, 2020

Since the beginning of the Covid-19, Muslim NGOs have been at the forefront of the crisis in France. Their implication at the national level challenges negative stereotypes on Islam in France and potentially reshapes their relations with public authorities in the provision of welfare services.

> *Covid-19 rapidly spreads in the entire world. We need to stick together, as only a global response would be able to stop the virus proliferation. (…) We try to support vulnerable people in France, but it is also crucial to keep in mind refugees and displaced persons abroad who risk once again to be victims if no one can contain the epidemic (…).*

As France is being struck by the Covid-19 pandemic, the message above was captured during a live-stream video on the Facebook page of *Human Appeal France*, one of the biggest French Muslim NGOs. While the whole country is in lockdown after President Macron's official announcement, Muslim NGOs have deployed their aid nationally with the intent to help people directly affected by the virus. For many organisations, it was unprecedented and required important adjustments to maintain their activities. At the same time, they have mobilized their staff and donors for long-term programmes as the virus would soon reach other parts of the world and the consequences might be even worse. The arrival of Ramadan campaigns in April and May when religious donations generally increase has strengthened their mobilization.

In what ways are French Muslim NGOs contributing and taking action during the Covid-19 crisis? What can we learn about Muslim humanitarianism through their involvement in fighting the pandemic in France?

Spontaneous reactions and national solidarity

Muslim NGOs have been at the forefront of active intervention since the beginning of the public health emergency in France, providing support to the vulnerable populations impacted by the virus. They have been helping homeless people, asylum seekers, migrants and low-income families, but have also enlarged their regular operations to aid health staff and workers in precarious living conditions. For instance, they have helped those individuals that were forced to stop their professional activities by delivering them with food provisions or volunteering to take care of the medical staff's children when their parents are at

work. Many NGOs have also provided technical assistance to health institutions, such as hospitals, and offered medical supplies, (e.g. respirators, surgical masks and hydro-alcoholic gel). To carry out their actions, the organisations have launched multiple online fundraising campaigns which have been highly successful. For example, *Barakacity*, one of the most visible NGOs online has conducted daily donation challenges to reach 200 donations every 24 hours.

> *The actions of Muslim NGOs in times of crisis are characterized by a dual trend. Not only do they maintain their ordinary activities, but they also increase them as they try to fill the gap caused by the withdrawal of many other associations.*

This is possible since their members are usually relatively young and therefore less subject to the confinement measures. Following with the second trend, the Muslim NGO's capacity to respond to the crisis has increased their public visibility and their active partnerships with other associations in need of volunteers and with the overwhelmed public services. At the same time, they have been taking advantage of their strong presence on social media to communicate official instructions and guidelines from authorities. They have published advice regarding the necessity to respect quarantine, social distancing and how to act in these troubled times. As such *Muslim Hands France* shared detailed explanations on how to wash one's hands and explained "cleanliness is part of the faith". What emerged as a shared value among Muslim NGOs has been the promotion of a typical vision of aid that was not only restricted to material needs. They have encouraged their volunteers and donors to promote local solidarity with their neighbours, particularly towards elders or isolated populations unable to cover their basic expenses.

Challenging negative representations of Islam

This period exemplifies and probably accentuates many major factors that I have witnessed among Muslim NGOs over the last few years. It underlines the dynamic nature of these associations and their popularity as they enjoy increasing public

visibility, significant financial support and the development of a positive appearance which also enables a strong mobilizing capacity. With an important work presence in the French cities, their strong response to the pandemic has also demonstrated the vitality of volunteers in these associations where a large proportion of the staff and volunteers whom are born and educated in France are highly qualified.

> *Despite their involvement, Muslim NGOs remain unknown and relatively side-lined for their actions, which is likely the most recurring prejudice they face.*

They suffer from a lack of recognition, and, occasionally, from the mistrust of the government, humanitarian organisations and European public opinion. Indeed, Muslim NGOs face suspicion at the international level since 9/11 and the global "War on terror" led by the Bush administration. At the national level, they navigate in a relative hostile environment due to the French secularist regime (namely "laïcité") in which religion tends to be relegated to the private sphere. The establishment of Islam as a "public issue" since the 1980s (Talpin, O'Miel, Frégosi, 2017, p.27), the rise of Islamophobia in public discourse and the permanent debate on radicalization have also tarnished their image towards a broader audience.

In that regard, the crisis has probably contributed to bring to light the true value of Muslim NGOs, their daily participation and role in French society even as part of a "minority" group (Ndiaye, 2008). Once again *Barakacity* is undoubtedly one of the most salient illustrations. The NGO, which has long been negatively portrayed in the media and even accused of money laundering by French authorities, has distributed masks to health personnel in hospitals, even when the state failed to do so. Such actions vividly challenge dominant and negative stereotypes about Islam, often considered a "threat" to democratic values, and underlines the growing concerns of Muslim NGOs for domestic needs. It is worth highlighting that even when these organisations are not widely accepted in French society, they have contributed to ease the effects of the pandemic in

France.

Articulation of local and global actions

A socio-historical perspective is needed to better understand the NGO's active participation in domestic affairs. The oldest Muslim NGOs in France originated from the United Kingdom as the main British charities opened branches in France starting in the 1990s. France was perceived as a strategic location with one of the largest Muslim population in Europe. *Secours Islamique* – the former branch of *Islamic Relief -, Human Appeal, Human Relief Foundation, Muslim Hands*, are great examples of this. Originally, France was only considered a "market" for fundraising and French branches essentially had to activate the so-called "distant suffering" [*la souffrance à distance*] conceptualized by Luc Boltanski (1993). The idea was to make French Muslims aware of the situation of the faraway "*Umma*" (the Muslim community) in need. The money collected was sent to the head offices in the UK, where it would be allocated to the different projects, which were mainly international.

The current global crisis gives a meaningful illustration of the Islamic charitable work addressing needs both "at home" and abroad. Since the 2010s, most French Muslim NGOs have tried to combine humanitarian action abroad with social action in France. Indeed, a wave of change has been observed with the creation of national and local programs among "Franco-British" organisations. A new generation of organizations has also emerged, created by young French Muslims who mainly originate from poor neighbourhoods or French "banlieues". There are many reasons to explain this change of attitude towards local action, but the so-called "refugee crisis" has constituted a turning point with a "humanitarian" emergency in France. Another important aspect refers to the general context previously addressed and seems to be the desire and necessity for Muslim NGOs to gain public legitimacy and recognition nationally. For the oldest NGOs have long been perceived as "imported" organizations and regarded with suspicion due to their foreign identities: both as British and Muslim. However, the youngest associations continue to suffer from negative representations and *stigma*

associated to being young and Muslim who hail from (supposedly) unruly, dangerous and dirty places, which have been particularly affected by confinement measures.

By acting locally and taking into account French domestic needs including fellow non-Muslim citizens, Muslim NGOs apply, more and more, the saying “charity begins at home”. They thereby offer “evidence” of their French citizenship in addition to contributing to the common good. One can imagine the on-going crisis will continue to play a considerable role in shaping Muslim NGOs’ local perception and potentially reconfigures the relationship between Muslim NGOs and French authorities. Due to their importance, Muslim NGOs complement or even present an alternative to public welfare services for the most vulnerable people.

Nevertheless, as I illustrated in the introduction, the organisations’ actions in France cannot be disjointed from global solidarity towards all of those individuals in need.

> *Similar to the virus, which does not recognize borders, neither do Muslim NGOs which promote universal aid.*

Constant parallels are drawn between French needs and the challenges awaiting abroad, for instance, Palestinians and Rohingyas, people in Syria and in refugee camps in Greece. From a religious point of view, local action and actions abroad are part of an analogue Muslim humanitarianism and must, from a sociological point of view, be woven together through the concept of *bienfaisance*, “doing good” (Faure, 2020), used as a broader category of analysis.

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Ethnography at an Impasse?

Fieldwork Reflections During a Pandemic

Nina Teresa Kiderlin
May, 2020

As COVID-19 disrupts life for billions of people around the world, it also calls into question the very notion of fieldwork and compels us to reflect on the practices that we take for granted. In what follows, three PhD students explore how the pandemic is affecting our fieldwork, prompting us to consider alternative approaches to being in the field and doing ethnography while bodily distancing.

Elise Hjalmarson reflects on research ethics from her attic apartment in Madrid

where she was in the early stages of participant recruitment and observation among Latin American migrants, notably Cubans and Ecuadorians.

Nina Teresa Kiderlin shelters-in-place in Chicago where she had just moved for a predoctoral fellowship at Northwestern University and to conduct research on development of transnational legal orders through public and private actors.

Sonja Ruud lives and conducts field research in Luxembourg. While studying the country's recent transition to fare-free public transportation, she explores ways to study mobility while being temporarily immobilised herself.

Together, we discuss emerging ethical concerns resulting from the unique physical risk that we now pose to each other, how technology might mediate our fieldwork interactions, and the shifting role of mobility in contemporary research practices.

Ethical Dilemmas, Old and New

The biomedical undercurrents of contemporary research ethics are well-documented. Ethical principles such as 'do no harm' and informed consent trace

back to the abuse of marginalised, racialised, and incarcerated communities in medical experiments. As we wrestle with the potential biological risk that we now pose to our participants – and, indeed, they to us – we share the sense that our work has taken on unanticipated biomedical dimensions. The outbreak of COVID-19 and range of measures adopted in its wake also exacerbate inequalities, amplifying the risks for those of us interacting with groups that may not have access to health care, unemployment insurance, or other vital supports they require. Such considerations underscore the salience of reflexivity.

> *COVID-19 may not discriminate, but neither does it place us equally at risk.*

Our ability to mitigate our potential exposure is bolstered by our relative privilege as young white women with health insurance, no child-care obligations, and as citizens of Western/European states. From her apartment in Madrid, one of the outbreak's early epicentres, Elise is conscious that her own situation pales in comparison to that of many of her informants. Our field sites, while differentially affected, remain politically stable, insulating us from the worst social and economic effects of the present moment.

Although our field sites—macro and micro—vary, we are each embroiled in unforeseen ethical debates, particularly around our presence in or withdrawal from public space. These are not decisions we confront for ourselves or our interlocutors alone, but for everyone who frequents these shared arenas. In Sonja's case, minimising time spent in public entails a retreat from the transit vehicles and hubs which were previously key sites for her ethnographic research. While public transportation in Luxembourg is still operational, she temporarily avoids using these spaces for research purposes in deference to those for whom public transit remains essential to their livelihoods.

As we consider a way forward, some of our ethical questions only time can answer. When will it be reasonably safe for us and our informants to continue in-person observation or interviews? As the outbreak slows and we reach for a 'new normal', how will we temper the ethical imperative to care for, respect, and

protect our participants with the urgent need for informed policy solutions? How do we ensure that efforts to protect the most marginalised, both before and during the outbreak, do not result in their exclusion from important discussions about how to move forward as a society?

While there are additional ethical dilemmas to explore pertaining to the social, material, and spatial, we believe that there is merit to prioritising physical dimensions directly related to our health and safety—dimensions which prompt us to reconsider how to do ethnography while maintaining bodily distance.

Virtual Research

As researchers, some of our most pressing questions revolve around the communities we work with moving online. Recent work develops 'Netnography' and big data analysis, but the implications of COVID-19 reach extensively further than we imagined. Most online ethnography focuses on specific arenas of social life, such as bitcoin trading or gaming. Yet now, cyberspace is a site we all navigate through virtual research. This is not just an issue for seasoned scholars; the lack of training and knowledge of tools which facilitate ethnography online is prevalent across academic generations. The three of us, having completed our prior studies in different countries, received limited training in online research, security, or safe data management/storage.

Mediating research through technological devices might be a source of concern, but it also presents opportunities. Video technology allows for invited glimpses into the private lives of our interlocutors, as well as for us to virtually enter each other's homes. Will this create intimacy and allow for further insights than would be possible by an interview in public or office space?

We must also educate ourselves on 'new' risks for participants online. Privacy concerns are ever more pressing in the wake of governments employing sophisticated technological surveillance techniques to combat COVID-19. Whilst

these might be needed to contain the spread, we should avoid becoming complicit in these practices, particularly given anthropology's colonial history. 'Observing' people online creates issues of possible metadata analysis, data protection, and traceability, as well as security concerns in online interactions, especially with marginalised communities or those at risk.

> *To offer our participants anything resembling 'informed consent' and confidentiality, we must know what we are asking people to consent to and the limits of anonymity we can offer online.*

While keen to make use of the technological resources available to us, we remain uncertain about some of their ramifications for our fieldwork. Affinity, trust, and the comfort to speak freely may not be so easily established virtually. Will phone or video calls permit us to broach the same topics with our interlocutors, including the personal, intimate, or taboo? Confined to our homes alongside family and other relations, do we have sufficient privacy to engage virtually with our interlocutors? Nina recruits interviewees via snowball sampling and wonders about building rapport with individuals she meets solely online. Is ethnographic bonding as effective via virtual channels? Both Elise and Nina are hesitant to schedule interviews in a time of personal upheaval, while Sonja has found her participants remain eager to share their experiences via virtual interviews.

Social life and interactions with research communities are shifting fundamentally through COVID-19. We avoid each other on the sidewalk and in the aisles of supermarkets – how will this behaviour translate to cyber interactions? Given the option, will our participants opt for virtual over in-person interviews? How might the mediation of technological devices, our inability to observe body language, or gauge inferred meanings influence our work?

Fieldwork (Im)mobility

While temporarily immobilised during this time – albeit to different degrees – we are all acutely aware of the centrality of mobility to our research practices. For many anthropologists, mobility is not just a methodological staple but part and parcel of our shared disciplinary identity.

Many researchers' travel plans are disrupted by the pandemic, while others who already traveled to a field site only to be confined to their apartments must now decide whether or how long to stay.

> *The ability to leave – or even to contemplate leaving – is undoubtedly a privilege.*

Each of the three of us inhabit multiple geographies, between our university in Switzerland, our home countries, and our field sites. Nina and Elise are both debating whether to stay in their field sites, a process which entails a comparative evaluation of different locales. Our uncertainty about how long this period will last complicates such decisions. Yet we are also aware that most people – including, perhaps, many of our participants – do not have options to weigh.

Elise's personal decision-making is complicated by her awareness of her interlocutors' immobility, some of whom are no longer in Spain by choice but seek to participate in voluntary return programs – sometimes referred to as 'soft-deportation' – as a means of going back to their countries of origin.

Unlike her colleagues, Sonja is conducting field research in the place where she was already living, sparing her the tough decision of whether to stay or go. However, mobility is critical to her research on public transportation in Luxembourg, in both thematic and methodological terms. Prior to being confined to her apartment, she spent much of her time in transit: conducting participant observation in buses, trains, and trams and traveling around the country for interviews. Now, she is increasingly dependent on mobile technologies to maintain contact with interlocutors and to follow transport developments via news and social media.

> *As we each adapt to changing circumstances, we wonder how these experiences of immobility may affect ethnographic practices.*

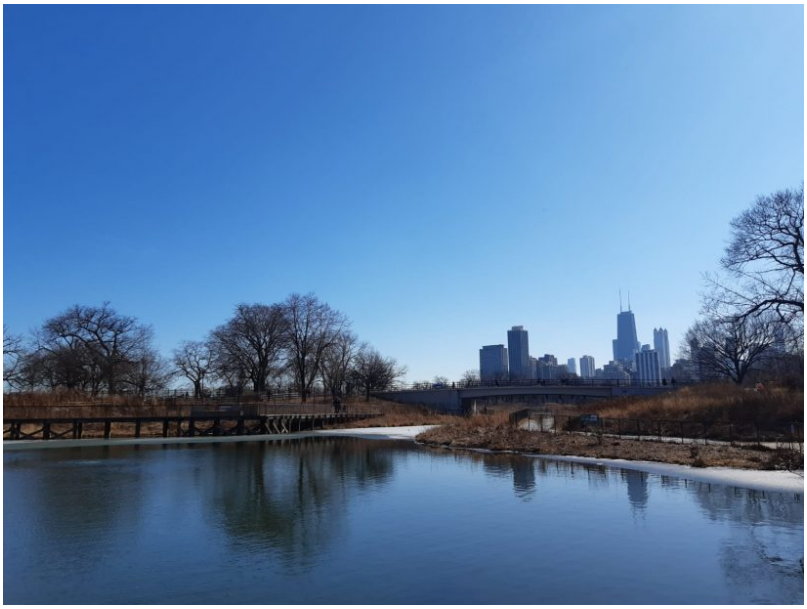
Will more researchers be inspired to explore possibilities for fieldwork at a distance, or will we become further convinced of the importance of moving our own bodies in order to be physically present with our interlocutors? Many of us, in our personal lives, are increasingly conscious of how the carbon emissions produced by our mobilities contribute to climate change. Yet we are slower to think collectively and reflexively about the centrality of mobility to our methodologies. While none of the authors argue that anthropologists should no longer travel beyond their home cities or countries, we contend that it is time to think critically about our modes and rates of travel—for fieldwork as well as conferences.

Uncharted Territory

Despite feeling that our fieldwork plans are at an impasse, there is no doubt that we are still practicing ethnography in our everyday lives. In our varied situations, we continue to wrestle with how to do ethnography while practicing bodily distancing. Will virtual communication prove a poor replacement for in-person interactions, hindering ethnographic bonding?

> *In the meantime, how can we ensure that the safety of our interlocutors – not to mention our own health – takes precedence over institutional timeframes, supervisory expectations, career goals, and our own funding and academic deadlines?*

The present moment also reveals a need for 'reskilling'. In preparing for fieldwork, none of us anticipated anything like this, and therefore lack a contingency plan to shift our research away from in-person interactions. While we cannot predict the arrival of the next pandemic, these experiences may change how we prepare for and conduct fieldwork as we expand our knowledge of technological and methodological tools. It is also critical that we create and maintain social safety nets, as researchers arriving in field sites distinct from their permanent homes are rendered more vulnerable by their social isolation.



Yet we are also heartened to see the novel ways in which people around the world are reaching out to one another during this time, to maintain and strengthen social ties across new distances. For instance, our cohort sustains close contact via regular video calls and is undertaking new collaborative projects. Some of us are in frequent contact with our key interlocutors, practicing mutuality and care through virtual forums where possible.

> *We wonder: will our shared experiences of having lived (together, yet apart) through the multiple crises generated by COVID-19 contribute to further breaking down the divide between researcher and participant, or 'insider' and 'outsider'? Will it create new common ground, bridge gaps, or build solidarity across otherwise fragmented communities?*

When the dust settles, will new forms of political allyship emerge? What opportunities might these produce for fieldwork?

Some things are clear: 2019 and the world pre-coronavirus are already far behind us. As field researchers in these uncertain times, we are navigating uncharted territory.

Towards a Covid-19 lexicon of conceptual off-shoots: locking sociality down in the Netherlands and Spain

Elena Burgos Martínez
May, 2020

This piece reconsiders the importance and impact of pandemic's preventive discourses on existing language-scapes in society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, institutionalised anglophone paradigms of health and illness are

central to defining any form of normality and abnormality, and it is time to take the defining role of language seriously. The use of highly conceptual language across the world, and specifically within Europe, signals a lack of consideration for the linguistic relativity of different locales. Governments, businesses, and academia have constructed a full COVID-19 lexicon intended to sustain 'business as usual' and hold the public in check. But does the assumed universality and 'simplicity' of the formulation of preventive rules function more as an obstacle than as facilitator?

The carefully crafted language promoted and prescribed by national and international media, supranational organisations (such as the WHO) and governments across Europe emphasizes existing frictions in society, imperceptible only at first. Much is lost in translation; more is lost where these words are pushed onto places where diversity is already underrepresented in the macro-narratives of 'prevention'. As a Spaniard living in the Netherlands, I have observed the return of the North-South divide and how the national press in both countries has been falling under the the fallacies of statistical information. As I sit at home in The Hague, it was just a matter of time until modes of inquiry from applied linguistic anthropology could be put to good use. If we are to approach the politics of everyday new jargon for a new normal, let us start by peeling the onion, let us find the institutionalised lexicon hiding in the illusion of universalism.

A lockdown with Dutch characteristics

On March 17th, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated that the Netherlands would not go into a full lockdown, despite criticism across Europe that viewed this Dutch approach as reactive rather than preventive. Rather, the country would instead adopt a so-called 'intelligent' lockdown' – an intelligence resting in individual social responsibility. So what does this 'intelligent lockdown' signify? These are times when governments are regularly addressing 'the population' and

calling for unity, responsibility and pride (in their solidarity). But how do national cultural differences figure in the language deployed to address society, a language that (albeit formalised) is still articulated on the basis of hegemons of health, illness, healing, and the body? Where I live, in The Hague, the sociocultural body of the city is a body-multiple (reminiscent of the work of Dutch medical anthropologist Annemarie Mol).

> *The city as multiple does not suggest fragmentation but a continuity of experiences and daily encounters, with collective individualism practised differently by those who embody and represent constructed nativism and those who do not.*

And despite its diversity, Rutte's 'intelligent lockdown' somehow fails to address the entirety of the population. Upcoming elections no doubt inspire the re-vamping of Dutch nationalism embodied in the idea of (responsible) individualism.

In his speeches, he leaves 'lockdown' untranslated; he wants to keep that concept as a foreign concept, distancing himself and the Dutch state from what had been defined as Draconian measures across so-called Southern Europe. As an untranslated foreign concept, the lockdown travels through Dutch society, the institutions, government, elites, and policy of which have re-defined themselves as 'rational and neutral' to disavow their own colonial past. And as the concept of lockdown travels around society unattended, it latches onto the population's struggles to understand how one can intelligently keep a 'frisse neus' (a fresh nose, i.e. getting some fresh air), show active compassion for each other, and at the same time keep at recommended distance. 'Others' are a daily menace, so to speak, but please keep things cool and kind.

> *'Keeping a fresh nose' is presented as a Dutch vernacular in opposition to 'lockdown', a demonised concept for all that it represents: economic recession and the Dutch citizen as 'plague-spreader'.*

Both, ‘frisse neus’ and ‘lockdown’, engage in a contradictory dialectic dance, a dance intended to be danced by those who can afford to self-isolate accordingly: those who are not space-affluent, those who rely on the proximity of safety networks to survive the systems and policy that segregate them, those have always been kept from majority’s imaginary 1.5 metre away from inclusion, forced into normatives of ‘assimilation’ and ‘adaptation’ that are unintelligible in that they were never intended to include diversity.

The 1.5 metre-society in the Netherlands offers a glimpse of how the governing bodies, and its welfare policy approach, understand (and struggles with) multiculturalism and the ‘integration’ of ‘immigrants’. The Hague, with all its diversity, segregation and social inequalities, particularly struggles to digest standardised instructions, highly conceptual vocabulary, and the homogenising of sociality. Social distancing is not only (oxy-)moronic but above all relative: place, space and sociality are already differently conceptualised and practised by Haagse inhabitants of diverse backgrounds. As a result, the population’s lack of response to preventive measures is often interpreted by national media and certain segments of society as disrespectful; for some, it is taken as a clear sign of a lack of integration or of education. The more privileged members of society complain about the lack of regard for (collective) health as if such disregard were an endemic feature of the identity of others, often alluding to class or ethnicity to explain such so-called antisocial behaviour. They situate themselves as the rational and prudent citizens who really embody and represent Dutchness. Only recently has the conceptual language of COVID-19 begun to be discussed in national media. The romanticising of new pandemic vocabulary, however, is yet to include a meaningful discussion about the nationalistic and neoliberal frameworks within which COVID-19’s preventive lexicon has been constructed.

> *These foreign vernaculars foster existing social frictions when (mis-)translated into a country’s hegemonic vernacular.*

Spain and the fallacy of an effective lockdown

While governments, media and public across Europe buy into the nationalisation of lockdowns and homogenised preventive paradigms, Spain also grapples with the translation of COVID-19's lexicon. In Spain's case, new preventive discourses and jargon are unsuccessfully framed within the continuity of a history of internal rupture and the politicisation of care. With expert knowledge and agency constantly competing with the demagogic tendency of the country's crisis vernaculars. Here, vernaculars of crisis and healing dominated by endemic concepts such as 'acuerdo' ('agreement' as demanded by central government of regions) and 'eficacia' ('efficacy', as demanded from regions to the central government and implying a respecting of regional diversity and agency).

> *Dialectic dances of recognition, expertise and agency transpire through the country: from the centralised powers of the government to the decentralised arms and legs of the country.*

The return of knowledge, sets the country into familiar histories of internal bleeding, tinting its participation in EU's debates with certain resentment: Spain does not want to be seen as draconian and grapples with institutionalised discourses of European 'unity' as it hides the challenges of its internal maladies. Meanwhile, Europe, and much of its media, also struggles in turn to respect Spain's diversity and contemporaneity, the use of adjectives such as 'draconian'. This brings back Povinelli's liberal multiculturalism (2002): an inequality of liberal forms of (European) multiculturalism emerging not from its superficial engagement with difference, but from its strongest vision of a new (supra-) national cohesion. Spain, grapples with the lack of contextualised understanding of its regional and local dynamics by international press and attempts to counterbalance it by politicising care. In this vicious cycle of performative 'hand-washing' and 'face-keeping', Spain also detaches itself from the concept of 'lockdown': an untranslated concept implying flapping tendencies.

Indeed, ‘business as usual’.

What makes a lockdown relaxed or intensive, full or partial, intelligent or draconian? And why is Europe pursuing ‘unity’ by means of ‘assimilation’ rather than inclusion of national complexity? In all this conceptual mess and preventive competition, existing social inequalities in both Spain (long-lasting interregional tensions) and the Netherlands (its struggle with ‘biculturalism’ and ‘liberal multiculturalism’) surface with all the potential to be revisited by those in power. The dominance of institutionalised paradigms of health, the popularity of the loosely translated (anglophone) lexicons of so-called supranational organisations, the permeability of the disregard for context-specific complexity, and the instrumentalisation of othering mechanisms across Europe function as the biggest obstacle for the population to heal, not only physically, but also mentally and historically.

> *The individualistic approaches imposed on minoritized and othered sectors of society are part and parcel of a new old glorification of a form of ‘rational’ individualism, even at continental level, only accessible for those who can afford it.*

The world is ill with disregard for its own diversity. This is an illness whose ‘hand-washing’ and ‘face-keeping’ preventive strategies have entertained us with the illusion that we can carry on asymptomatically through denial of internal inequalities and disruptive histories. Every day, we digest conceptual vocabulary, we inherit new forms of exclusion with the return of universalism. Nevertheless, some of you may consider this as necessary to communicate faster and across boundaries. But is there really communication where there is no understanding?

Virtual Edition à la Corona

Allegra
May, 2020

Hello, readers. We hope that you and your loved ones are all staying safe (and sane?!) during these odd and testing times. In this month's #events post, we've pulled up a list of online events that you can attend while on confinement with a child on a knee and the kettle on.

As always, if you would like your event to feature in our next events list or if you wish to write a short report, don't hesitate to get in touch with our events admin, Kanchi, at events@allegralaboratory.net or through any one of our social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

Online Seminars: OLIve Weekend Programme
When: April 18 to June 6 2020, Every Saturday – 01:30 – 02:30 PM (CET)
Where: Seminars available here

Zoom Meeting ID: 963 395 8369
Password for joining the Zoom meeting: 087636

OLIve Weekend Programme Budapest is running the Open Seminar Series every Saturday online. The seminar is primarily for the students and staff at CEU and the international OLIve community. However, guests are welcome if respectful of the learning environment.

The seminar schedule is as follows:

- April 18: Everyday Struggles for Environmental Justice by Tamara Steger
- April 25: Migrant Rights and Justice by Andras Lederer
- May 9: Gender and Social Justice by Viola Zentai
- May 16: Housing and Justice
- May 23: Digital Rights by Veszna Wessenauer
- May 30: Uneven development, the unbalanced relation between city and countryside: the case of Thailand by Claudio Sopranzetti
- June 6: Colonial Configurations: race, law and justice by Prem Kumar Rajaram

Online Seminar: The Politics of Vulnerability

Jointly organised by Allegra Lab and PIR_Programme Indépendant de Recherche

When: Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 2:10 PM – 4:10 PM UTC+02
Where: You can join the virtual classroom via this link: meet.google.com/xoa-qipy-qxs

This session of Julie Billaud's ongoing course on the anthropology of humanitarianism will discuss the politics of vulnerability, taking the emblematic figure of the child as an entry point. This seminar is part of a longer series of seminars that will run until the end of may. For each of these seminars, a Facebook event will be created where the link to the virtual classroom will appear.

The seminar schedule is as follows:

- April 23: The Politics of Vulnerability
- April 30: The Need to Help
- May 7: Humanitarianism, Militarism, Abandonment
- May 14: Humanitarian Techno-Legal Designs (Somil Kumar)
- May 21: Philanthro-capitalism
- May 28: Muslim Humanitarianism (Guest speaker: Till Mostowlansky)

To receive the preparatory material, e-mail Julie Billaud (you need a gmail address).

Summer School: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

When: July 6 – 17, and July 20 – 31 2020.

Vrije Universiteit is offering 2-week long online, multi-disciplinary courses throughout July. The courses are suitable for undergraduates, graduates, PhD students and professionals, and cover topics ranging from religious and global identity in Africa, to the foundations of international business. The courses are split into two sessions, running from July 6 – 17 for the first session, and July 20 – 31 for the second.

A list of the courses, as well as costs and entry requirements, can be found here.

The application form can be found here, and the deadline for application is May 1 2020, 23:59 CET.

Online Webinar: UrbanA Community Conversation on the Wiki

When: Tuesday, April 21 2020 15:00 – 16:30 PM CEST.

This UrbanA Community Conversation will explore the value of Wiki as a tool for creating a knowledge commons, as well as offering an introduction into how to Wiki and a chance to practice with the UrbanA community.

The registration form for this event can be found here, and a link to the Zoom meeting will be sent to you via email.

If you're looking for even more things to do, check out our Corona diaries – a

thematic thread that we have put together about pursuing anthropology “from home”. You can find all our Corona blog posts here, and podcast diaries that you can listen to on our soundcloud page.

Feature image (cropped) by Alex Motoc (Courtesy of Unsplash)

Slow. the. fuck. down.

Ian M. Cook
May, 2020

Do you remember what an ordinary day in your life looked like last autumn? Back when Corona was just a below average beer and social distancing described what happened to your attention when an academic at a party started talking about their favourite theorist?

Depending on where you lived, it was probably relatively smooth. Of course, there were many things which probably did not work as well as you would've liked them to. Personally, I struggled between many uncertainties: my university leaving the country I live in, the program I direct being *de facto* suspended for a second time for political reasons, ongoing Brexit unknowns, and the cruel promise that Liverpool might finally win the league this year. All this in Hungary, a state in which services are crumbling and bureaucracy was invented to make people cry. And yet, certainly compared to those of you who have lived or are living through state collapse, things sort of worked.

Of course – as a reviewer emphasized – there are people in many parts of the world who lived amidst unpredictability, multiple constraints and the hovering prospect of death long before our global Corona crisis. Indeed, as the entries from the global south produced within our Corona Diaries series point out, groups such as migrant labourers have experienced the pandemic in brutalising and dehumanising ways, but from a position of pre-existing hardship.

> *And, as I know from my own anthropological work amongst door-to-door salespeople in urban India, the smooth running of everyday life is something some groups have to work hard at to create.*

However, this post is not about such groups, but rather academics like me in the global North(ish) for whom things – in spite of our complaints – mostly ran according to plan until a few weeks ago.

By which I mean food arrived to the market each morning, my kid went to preschool five days a week, I could grab a beer almost any time of the day, people collected the rubbish a few days a week, the classrooms I taught in were clean with functioning technology, the students I taught were (mostly) equipped with functioning technology and my own personal, domestic, labour, social and cultural patterns moved in and out of synchrony with other patterns to various degrees in a way I could (mostly) manage.

However, I was also aware that whenever I experienced a seemingly smooth environment, somebody had to work to make this happen. Sarah Sharma (2014) calls these 'temporal architectures' – arrangements of technologies, commodities, services, or labour in a certain locality. Very often, she argues, such arrangements are done to benefit one group of people to the detriment of another. An easy example: the university is clean because cleaning staff worked unsociable hours to keep it clean.

> *The response to Corona should make visible the hidden patterns which sustained our lives.*

Slowly at first, and then suddenly very very quickly, pillars of this temporal architecture started to collapse as things shut down and people were advised, urged or ordered to stay at home (if possible). And yet many people, including many people in academia, believed – and still believe – things could carry on as if they did not need the labour of many other people, the access to certain technologies, the provision of services and the flow of commodities.

'Teach your classes from home', they say, assuming everyone has fast wifi, doesn't have a 5-year-old bouncing off the walls of their one-bedroom flat, and might not be at all concerned with making arrangements for sick or vulnerable family members. 'Do home schooling for kids', as if everyone can continue their conference calls, paper deadlines, cooking and cleaning whilst suddenly learning how to teach children (or in the case of some academics, teach at all). In short, let's all carry on with our lives as if they were uninterrupted.

> *The obsession with uninterruption is one of immense stupidity. People are dying, things are collapsing, it's ok if the semester is extended a couple of weeks.*

It is especially galling, because some people need to speed up and offer uninterrupted service despite immense difficulties. By which I mean those who work in healthcare, food provision, transport and other essential services. Our work does not have such an urgent immediacy.

But we should not blame ourselves (too much). There are temporal logics at play which we are beholden to – grant deadlines don't disappear, short term contracts don't get extended, student loans or scholarships cannot be stretched, and jobs are under threat or have been already lost. And, of course, those of us with contracts (even definite ones) are luckier than those who have either been sent home on unpaid leave or were working gig to gig.

> *Thus, we all clamour to find ways to keep on being productive, even though our temporal architectures have crumbled around us.*

University management, grant agencies, students, teachers and everyone else needs to come to a realisation that an interruption is not a failure. It’s a moment people need to rearrange the temporal patterns of their life amidst massive change. Your hyper-productivity is predicated upon complex systems that are now under massive strain (if they were not before).

And so I have message to everyone in a situation like me, not least myself:

slow. the. fuck. down.

Virus and the City: Urban Experiences in Self-Isolation

Sabrina Stallone
May, 2020

The way we make sense of space has radically changed as a novel Coronavirus spread, with no clear end in sight. While our physical surroundings shrink and our affective geographies might extend enormously, how do we still make use of and perceive the cities with which we identify, that glue together our social networks, our structures of solidarity and dissent? With my doctoral ethnographic research delayed indefinitely, I can't refrain from thinking what the city as a receptacle and catalyst of social life brings into the analysis of global pandemics – or where it falls short. Why and how does living in and representing the city still matter in times of solitary confinement and isolation? And how can this moment of crisis be used to rethink what we want our cities to be?

These questions reminded me of a vignette in James Holston's 1989 ethnography of Brasília. One of his interlocutors, having moved to the new capital from another Brazilian city, stated that one of the most profoundly shocking aspects of his new

place of residence was its lack of street corners. He remembered his native city, in which he walked to the same corner every time he wanted to "meet a friend, pass the time, find a neighbour or hear the news" (1989: 105). With street corners replaced by residential cul-de-sacs or high-speed roads and traffic circles, urbanity, in his eyes, could not be recreated. The street corner stands as a node for information exchange, economic trade, and social interaction.

In preparation for my now postponed fieldwork, I articulated a gendered critique of the street corner as described in Holston's analysis, one indebted to a number of great feminist urban ethnographies that illustrate how, for LGBTQ+ folks and non-male bodies, the urban street corner can be a site of danger; and in most parts of the world, a site where a body's respectability is inevitably negotiated or challenged. But currently, the street corner has simply become fully unavailable, inaccessible. The spread of a viral disease, as The New York Times has proclaimed, is essentially anti-urban. It simply leaves the corners of our sociality unused, and thus useless.

Holston describes the street corner as an aorta of urban life, but only within a web of relations. It gives vitality to the squares, shops and residences it punctuates, but it can only survive if the storefronts and apartment blocks are dynamic, permeable; only if the city as site of capitalist acceleration is not completely hollowed of its relational component. As political scientist Carlotta Caciagli pointed out in the Italian Jacobin, in times like these, the urban public space makes us uncomfortable, we no longer belong to it and it no longer belongs to us. It becomes merely the connection of thousands of private spaces, which, once left, need to be returned to in the briefest time possible.

But it is not only the vitality of the producer-consumer coordinates that falters under these conditions, with cafés devoid of personnel and customers and corner store fridges humming unraided. In an illuminating piece for Society & Space, Abdoumaliq Simone and Michele Lancione ask how we can keep the infrastructures outside of our domestic confinements functioning and responsive for those who cannot afford to stay inside. That most of the service industry is on

lockdown cuts into the livelihoods of those who do not directly benefit from remunerated labour, but from its ripples: those who populate the publicness of our cities at large, street vendors, sex-workers, the unemployed, retired, informal workers and dwellers, whose nodes come undone. These issues point to broader questions concerning the inequalities of liveable infrastructures:

> *Looking at the relationality of a street corner as a metonymy for urban experiences, especially through a gendered lens, can help us understand the interlinkages of city and sociality.*

Consider the news headline about a women's shelter in Zurich, regularly offering 24 beds to women in need, which had to go into quarantine on March 25 and block new intake after one of the temporary residents was tested positive with the novel virus. In a number of Swiss cities, there had already been a scarcity of sites of refuge or support for women prior to the crisis, with many a shelter at constant capacity (SODK 2019; Stiftung gegen Gewalt 2018). The lack of safe spaces – as well as the "coming undone" of potentially less safe, but essential nodes in the public space – in one of the most expensive countries in the world rearranges the urban geographies of women in need, driving them out of cities or fully keeping them in the confinement of precarious or abusive homes. Even in more diffuse cases of abuse, with inevitable job loss and the proverbial "second shift" at home abounding, lifetime earnings might never recover for single female earners or heads of family.

> *The publicness of corners and squares is the ground on which these inequalities unfold, but also where the city allots room to protest, contest, make oneself heard.*

As architect and planner Mohammad Gharipour argues, the democracy of public space is reflected in the architectural maximization of space in which people can stage independence protests, or later commemorate them (2016: 6). This definition points to the inherently relational nature of urban publics, as it does not

only include the architectural emptying of a space for protest, but also its framing; its ability to become an arena, because it can be observed and entered, filled, from a range of vantage points and corners. The "contemporaneity" of cities, which includes in an Arendtian public sphere gathering to practice the relational performance of being political collectively, is officially inhibited, or at least severely limited in times of lockdowns and self-isolation.

In my hometown of Zurich, the local chapter of the feminist strike movement, assembled in preparation for and further fuelled by the National Women*'s Strike of June 2019, has relentlessly addressed the above-discussed gendered inequalities of the pandemic. While many of their actions have focused on the online dissemination of essential information (hotline numbers and mapping initiatives for precarised people), considerable urban protest has manifested around visible corners, bridges and walls, proclaiming calls to action and palimpsestically amending existing political discourse.

On March 26, a subchapter of this collective organised a wake on Zurich's Helvetiaplatz, which it has dubbed "Ni Una Menos Square" as an homage to the homonymous Latin American movement against gender-based violence. The event, a ritual staged every Thursday night after the murder of a woman* somewhere within Swiss borders, served as a commemoration of a recent victim of femicide in Switzerland. The wake was attended by 22 women*, songs were sung, information shared and mutual encouragement was given, even across reputedly safe physical distance.

> *The square's function as a public stage was perhaps diminished in its immediacy by the lack of passers-by and onlookers that usually characterize the square; but its role was strengthened as a node of much-needed affective exchange between activists in a time where its conditions of possibility are impoverished.*

Although the women* followed federal regulations concerning metric proximity, police in three cars surrounded them after 25 minutes and threatened to press

immediate charges should the square not be vacated. The group broke up and quietly dispersed in different directions.

The images of these and more acts of protest were quickly disseminated online, emphasizing the localised trajectories of digital networks, often defined through their deterritorial reach. There is a ceaseless flow of words and symbols that abide by the solidarity measures of physical distancing while strengthening the voices of dissent; and those who observe the action from armchair sidelines, rooftop terraces and other thresholds feel included and, ideally, keep vigil over the rights to *their* city, and *the* city in general. The crisis thus might weaken the power of the street corner and the square it opens up to in their relational materiality, but it also gives us a much-needed stimulus to rethink what we want our urban contemporaneity to be, possibly making us reach beyond our languid roles of producers or consumers.

A city, as social constructivists have told us, is whatever we decide to deem as such. A lot of power is given to dwellers in that definition: In times of crisis, it is a power to be seized. With respect to the street corner and what pertains to it, Abdoumaliq Simone and Michele Lancione call for an "undisciplined politics of inhabitation", in which we ask ourselves not only what infrastructures do to us, but what we can do to infrastructures to attune them to our needs and sensibilities.

> *We need to stay alert when public health strategies start folding into political repression, and find dissenting tactics to keep the political pulse of our public spaces running even if it means circumventing the affect and effect of physical contemporaneity; we must fully summon the power of internet ecologies, and pressure our municipalities to remain receptive to the actions of solidarity their citizens are setting up, at every corner.*

I was talking to a friend a few days ago, on one of these digital "bumps into each other" that virtually echo that crucial element of our city experience. When exchanging bits of news about his urban experiences under self-isolation and

mine, he suggested that we should hijack the lockdown of cities in the long run, make it our global strike demanding to rethink our futures; the biggest *détournement* in history. It's indeed a great idea, one borne out of the thresholds from which we observe. And cities – even now – yield the relational infrastructures that we need to implement it.

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Allegro vivace… the Italian laboratory, for better or for worse

Alessandro Monsutti

May, 2020

This little essay was conceived wandering in the Swiss countryside. I'm on sabbatical leave and my whole work and travel program has been disrupted by the measures taken in response to the pandemic. In response to these responses, I walk every day for two or three hours. I rediscover the virtues for the body and mind of such an activity, celebrated by Aristotle or Kant.

Currently, my colleague Stefano Morandini and I are conducting research supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation on the border between Italy and former Yugoslavia. We focus on a region mostly populated by Slovenian speakers, who were subjected to forced Italianization under the Fascist Regime and have faced a climate of widespread suspicion during the Cold War as potential Tito sympathizers. Our goal is to document how everyday life was dramatically transformed since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the integration of Slovenia into the European Union. People were

at last free to cross the border and reactivate ancient social and economic ties. The demarcation between two erstwhile political worlds was almost eradicated from the landscape.

Then came SARS-CoV-2! Italy has emerged between February and March 2020 as the main site of infection in Europe. Within a few days, Slovenia closed its border. Small border crossing points scattered along the whole region were sealed with cement blocks or boulders, images never seen even in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, when local people had laissez-passers allowing them to move to and fro. More important transit points again witnessed forgotten scenes: lowered barriers, stringent controls, endless line-ups of trucks and cars. Stupefaction: it turns out that states are indeed big players in today's world politics. All over Europe and beyond, we observe a dramatic national reterritorialization. Tightening controls at national borders is quickly accompanied by quickly expanding measures of surveillance within nation-states.

In Italy, the first lockdowns were implemented in late February 2020 in Lombardy and some neighbouring regions to hamper the spread of the virus and further contamination. The Prime Minister's Decree of 8 March 2020, expanded the following day to the whole national territory, introduced strict quarantine measures including banning non-essential travel; limiting free movement, except in cases of justified necessity; shutting down almost all commercial and retail businesses; closing schools and universities. People who had to move (for reasons of work, health or assistance to the elderly) needed to compile a self-declaration form.

> *In a complex love-hate relationship with Italy, I tend to think – probably unfairly – that the country has often anticipated broader political developments, most of the time for the worst.*

Mussolini came before Hitler, Berlusconi before Trump, not to mention the collapse of party politics that prevailed in Western democracies since the Second World War, and a few other treats. This time again, it seemed all of a sudden that

the analyses of Italian philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito had become an everyday reality for their fellow citizens. Would Italy be the sad precursor of the political fate of Western democracies?

With exuberant zeal and total faith in their expertise, some medical doctors were vocal in demanding a very restrictive interpretation of the decree with, for instance, the ban on jogging, even on one's own. Some leading journalists proposed to fight the pandemic using cell phones to track the movement of people and the physical distance they maintain among themselves, and eventually take measures against those who do not comply with the regulations. These experts do not walk but run in total *allegria* towards a society that might rapidly make Orwell's *1984* look like a rosy picture.

Some intellectuals propose an opposite perspective and contextualize the crisis. They argue that the pandemic's death toll is the outcome of years of bad political decisions. In a popular television broadcast, Massimo Cacciari, philosopher and former mayor of Venice, talks without mincing his words about the long-term responsibilities of the Italian political class and calls for structural reform. While the threat of pandemic virus was known, he denounces the weakening of the health system as a result of €37 billion cuts made in the past ten years. Another well-known philosopher, Nadia Urbinati, wonders if the responsibility of institutions is now being made to fall on citizens in an increasingly repressive logic.

While Roberto Esposito kept a rather low profile, Giorgio Agamben ignited a controversy when he published a brief statement in the *Manifesto* in late February 2020. His argument is well-known to people who read his work: the state of exception is becoming increasingly the normal government paradigm. After the so-called refugee crisis and the War on Terror, the pandemic contributes to a climate of widespread fear that is used to justify the limitation of fundamental freedoms in the name of security. He was attacked for having downplayed the medical seriousness of the epidemic, but his substantive argument has hardly been addressed in public media.

> *Are we condemned to slowly fall – almost inadvertently – into a more authoritarian society?*

For my former professor Fabrizio Sabelli, the epidemic is the sign that a certain threshold has been reached. He reminded me (in an exchange of emails) of Ivan Illich's concept of 'counterproductivity', which refers to a process that is supposed to be beneficial – like the production of wealth, to say – but is turning into a negative one. Could we wonder if the system based on the confidence in the endless growth of the capitalist economy might be about to collapse?

> *In Italy, we see a public polarization between those who candidly appeal for more surveillance and those who criticize the political elites and the institutions for their incapacity to have anticipated such an epidemic; between those who espouse with enthusiasm liberticide measures in the name of security and those who refuse to see the citizens pay exclusively the price of bad politics.*

We need to ask ourselves what society do we want, while being aware of the possibility of both totalitarian surveillance and nationalistic isolation. People inspired by Agamben would insist on danger stemming from the normalization of the state of exception and the resulting suspension of fundamental rights and freedoms. But we could in parallel get inspired by Illich's notion of structural counterproductivity and hope the epidemic might offer the opportunity to trigger a profound transformation of what it means to live together and to project ourselves towards a different future.

I started this essay with the current trend of national reterritorialization. What does the rapid spread of the infection mean beyond and across borders, especially for the most vulnerable? Is such a pandemic and other essentially transnational issues (climate change, financial capitalism, migration, to quote just a few) manageable by states and even multilateral institutions? Let us hope that SARS-CoV-2 will open a space to be occupied by citizens; let us advocate a return to politics of a more militant nature.

Acknowledgments

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Brave New Normal World

Mateusz Laszczkowski
May, 2020

When politicians begin to speak of a post-corona "new normality", what does that

imply? And why should we be concerned?

The spread of the coronavirus and the intensity of reactions – from personal to political, emotional to economic – are literally mind-blowing. From us social scientists, they compel reflection but also challenge everything we think we know. What appears true today may be absurd tomorrow. To me, the bottom line is this (and I realize perhaps I didn't make it sufficiently clear in my last post): quite apart from the question how big a threat the virus is in biological or medical terms (which is not to suggest it isn't!), this social, political, and economic crisis will change the world. Alas, one tendency emerging from these ongoing changes is toward greater political authoritarianism and constraints on basic freedoms. Terrorized by the mounting death tolls, Euro-American citizens by and large accept restrictions on their liberties and the expansion of executive powers as "emergency measures" – and indeed, are often calling for more.

> *But "temporary" emergency measures exhibit a curious tendency to become permanent.*

This may apply, for instance, to restrictions on public assembly, ever expanding surveillance, or "flexible" (read: precarious) labour relations and automation of people's jobs. Meanwhile, the generalized self-reproducing anxiety creates conditions in which it becomes increasingly difficult to critically reflect – individually and collectively – on long-term effects of what is going on. A generalized and potentially permanent "state of exception" (Agamben 2005) is being introduced, globally, among overwhelming confusion and fear.

In my original post, about a week ago, I wrote: "it comes to mind that the ruling elites (…) are using the pandemic to push the boundaries of the normal." These words echoed uncannily to me when, on 24 March, Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced new restrictions on movement, not unlike those introduced these days in many European countries. He said the measures were meant to enable, in some time, a "return to a new normality." This "new normality," he added, would not be "as before, because we will have to very

strictly follow all sanitary procedures." This ambiguous expression, as much as the new restrictions themselves, stirred up a flurry of questions and comments across the media.

> *Normality itself is a loaded concept.*

As Vincanne Adams, Andrew Littlejohn, and Raza Saeed show, in different ways, the "normality" of the capitalist order formed the ground for the present crisis; the biological phenomenon – the virus – merely accelerated disastrous processes that had long been underway. The point is more generally made in the anthropology of "natural disasters": catastrophes are often, if not always, outcomes of structural inequalities which have been normalized as the regular course of social life (e.g. Oliver-Smith 2009). So when governments say the post-epidemic "normality" will no longer be as before, perhaps we should welcome that as a promise? But the paradigms of the capitalist political economy are not questioned by those in positions of power. Quite the opposite: the explicit aim is to rebuild capitalism as quickly as possible – by autocratic means if need be. It is the everyday lives and prospects of ordinary people that will be affected. Some, like the *MIT Technology Review*'s editor-in-chief Gideon Lichfield, predict that in the long run, lockdowns such as today will have to be in force for roughly two months out of every three – unless we accept preventive measures in the form of unprecedented levels of surveillance targeting every one of us individually as a potential "plague-spreader". The logic of addressing the crisis by shifting the burden to society, and disproportionately to its middle and lower strata, while cushioning the corporate elites is familiar. Just as ordinary citizens are called to sacrifice for "climate change mitigation" while little is done to stop the rapacious industries from further ravaging the Earth, so with the pandemic, civil liberties and ordinary people's jobs are to be sacrificed while governments from Warsaw to Washington are busy saving the banks and corporations who, as Julie Billaud remarks, contributed to the catastrophe.

Two days after the PM's press conference, on 26 March, Poland's Health

Minister, Łukasz Szumowski explained in an interview just what that "new normality" would look like. The goal is to keep the economy running, but the lesson to be learned from the pandemic – the *benefit* – is that much work can be done online, the Minister said. Presumably, then, this is what the government is going to encourage, or decree. Other than work, all forms of social contact will be affected, Szumowski stated candidly. Practices such as greeting others with a handshake, a kiss, or a hug, social gatherings, home parties, and barbecues – will all have to be "socially stigmatized" for as long as there is no "commonly available vaccine" against covid-19 (read: indeterminately). Szumowski was referring specifically to Poland, but a recent study from Imperial College London advises strict "social distancing" as a general strategy for as long as there is no vaccine that works.

> *One fundamental reason to worry is that thinking is an intersubjective process that is impoverished without the possibility of direct spontaneous exchange.*

Permanent "social distancing" will thus negatively affect all areas of intellectual activity, from education and research to artistic creation, to cultural criticism and political critique. Moreover, the normalization of "social distancing" implies lasting restrictions on the freedom of assembly and movement. Despite the hype several years ago about the wave of so-called "facebook revolutions", you can't have a revolution without actually getting together with large numbers of other people in physical space. And of course, critical and subversive thought becomes more traceable when it turns digital. The pre-emption of collective dissent is thus a serious concern. Governments in multiple countries are taking concrete steps curtailing civil and political rights amid the havoc of the day. The granting of practically dictatorial powers to Prime Minister Viktor Orban by Hungary's parliament made headlines around the world. But to stick to examples from Poland, a recent draft of a blanket law designed mainly to safeguard economic stability, the so-called "anti-crisis shield", contained rules that would extend police powers and, inter alia, allow prosecutors (not courts) to put any suspect under house arrest for up to three months. And the Health Ministry, meanwhile,

has banned doctors from issuing public statements about the pandemic – a step grimly evoking China's information control policy. In response to Giorgio Agamben's by now oft-quoted posts on the present pandemic conjuncture as a "state of exception", some critics have suggested that the pandemic creates an opportunity for a "democratic biopolitics" from below, where fear is replaced by social solidarity, and discipline by an ethics of care. That would indeed be a welcome development, and the solidarity initiatives that appear in many cities are perhaps harbingers of something of that kind. However, it is important not to overlook the fact that these initiatives coexist with, and, as I argued in my last post, inadvertently help normalize, coercive biopolitics "from above".

> *At a different level, I am concerned about what this indeterminately prolonged state of exception may mean for social relations as such – or, more precisely, for our capacity to live as social beings.*

As we know from both Durkheim and Tarde – to name but two among social theory's Founding Ancestors – embodied affects are the kernel of all sociality, in humans as well as other animals (see Mazzarella 2009; Massumi 2014). They are formed and intersubjectively transmitted in direct eye-to-eye and tactile contact (also Massumi 2002). This is precisely what we are risking to lose in prolonged lockdown. Human communication has been mediated through various technological means for a very long time now, and there's a lot to be said about the benefits of communication technologies. But the less non-mediated contact we have, the more debilitated our embodied relational capacities will become over time, turning us from Aristotle's "social animals" increasingly into automata. This transformation will not happen overnight. But it may come faster than one might think.

There is a clear politico-economic dimension to this. Our lives in the post-covid-19 "new normality" are envisioned to become reduced to just two functions: production and (maximally individualized) consumption.

> *No gratuitous activities will be possible, or very few.*

Every exchange we have via “social media” is not our own – it is a commodity in the data market. Most of us know and accept this as a matter of fact. But in lockdown, even more of our everyday communication will depend on these commercial technologies. Thus, the process of alienation, which, as Marx noted, began with the appropriation of our labour, might soon culminate in near-total capitalist appropriation of our time and commodification of our communicative capacities.

Acknowledgments

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Infrastructure of the Archive / Archiving Infrastructure

Alessandro Rippa
May, 2020

Infrastructure is, in common understanding, a very material thing. We think of it as something made of iron and concrete. Even when going unnoticed in our everyday lives, infrastructure is an intimate presence in the working – or non-working – of much of what we deal with on a daily basis. Think of the roads we walk on our way to work in the morning. Or the server farms that store our data. Or the "cloud" in which different drafts of this article are located. Infrastructure, social scientists tell us, is both visible and invisible. Social and technical. Political and poetical.

As such infrastructure is also both material and immaterial. It is as concrete as the piece of railway that carries the subway cart I'm sitting in, and as imaginative as NASA's plans for a permanent station on Mars. Both, however, whether they exist or not, produce tangible outcomes. To better understand this set of apparent contradictions, social scientists have generally thought of infrastructures as *relational*. That is, it resembles more a dynamic socio-material assemblage, rather than merely a durable technical system (cf. Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018; Harvey, Jensen and Morita 2018; Rippa, Murton and Rest 2020).

This future – currently highly immaterial – issue of *Roadsides* is concerned with one particular relational aspect of infrastructure that has been scarcely explored so far. That between infrastructure and archive.

> *The point of departure for this issue is that the history of infrastructure that now shapes our lives, as well as of infrastructure that has never been built, lies in particular bodies of texts — documents, pictures, letters, books, videos, and so on.*

These archives are central to the imagining of infrastructure, to their planning as well to their making. Yet the relation between concrete infrastructure and such

bodies of text are seldom addressed.

As pertains to humanities scholarship traditionally speaking, archives have typically been state-run institutions holding historical, political, economic and social records from across various arms of governance and societal order. For the purpose of this issue, however, archives are understood in the broadest sense: any collection of documents, stories, reports, notices, banners, photographs, video recordings, sounds, posted bills and rumours – anything textual (in the term's broadest sense) that represents a writing and a reading of the social worlds created and mediated by infrastructure. Following on the work of Barry (2013), which enlists an analysis of official public oil industry documents to reveal their performative and institutional politics, we understand archives as consisting of both formal/official and local/vernacular material production, so as to show the multiple discourses and representations implicit in infrastructural processes.

> *In this sense, the archive is an epistemic assemblage that can be understood in three ways:*

a) an amalgamation of projective and managerial devices; b) a testament to calls for accountability and transparency made by local and international investors, municipalities, financial institutions and civil society organisations (Barry 2013); and c) a space for the reflection on infrastructure's quotidian nature: the lived experience of their planning, construction and maintenance.

This understanding of archives is foregrounded by the work of several scholars that, particularly within anthropology, have recently troubled commonsensical understandings of the archive as a written and solid past (Stoler 2002; Mueggler 2011). Rather, this scholarship addresses archives — and archival research — not merely as sites of knowledge retrieval and *extractive* activity, but as a site of engaged critical *ethnographic* research. As Ann Stoler succinctly puts it, scholars need to move "from archive-as- source to archive-as-subject" (2012: 93).

In bringing together these two approaches, one based on the recent "infrastructure turn" in the social science and one rooted in a critical approach to archives and archival knowledge, this upcoming issue of *Roadsides* will thus address some of the following themes:

- *Infrastructure and the politics of imagination*. How are infrastructure projects envisioned and documented, before, during, and after their construction?
- *Infrastructure projects that exist only within particular archives.* What does the history of what has not been built — or what Carse and Kneas (2019) term the "shadow history" heuristic — tell us about what has been built?
- *The archive as an infrastructure*. What can we gain by applying some of the infrastructural thinking outlined above to archives and archival research (and vice-versa)?
- *Methods*. The study of infrastructure often presents inevitable methodological issues. How does an archival approach can help and how might that look like concretely?

This collection is scheduled for publication in **February 2021**. For any queries, or submissions, please email Alessandro Rippa at alessandro.rippa@tlu.ee. If you want to receive the Call for Papers and updates on *Roadsides* publications and future issues, please subscribe to our newsletter. To peruse all issues of *Roadsides*, visit the journal's website: https://roadsides.net

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Architecture as/and Infrastructure

Madlen Kobi
May, 2020

Over the past two decades, infrastructure has emerged as a central concept in a larger conversation about architecture, landscape, and urbanism. Providing citizens with reliable infrastructure systems is of pressing concern for the management of contemporary cities, where growing populations raise challenges for the provision of clean air, affordable housing and resources. As Stephanie Carlisle and Nicholas Pevzner (2013) write, “The most difficult questions of urban performance are often inseparable from the functioning and design of urban infrastructure.” Infrastructure has surfaced as a primary field of investment for creating sustainable and livable urban landscapes; it is both a public endeavor and an integrated part of architectural design projects, as Shannon and Smets (2016) emphasize in their study on how the architecture of infrastructure influences the organization of the inhabited landscape.

Our forthcoming *Roadsides* collection 004 proposes a perspective on contemporary cities that interrogates how architecture and urban design function as and with infrastructure, intersecting and rearticulating spaces, places, and the power relations embedded therein.

> *Based on rich ethnographic studies, our forthcoming issue draws particular attention to power relations, material networks, processes of ruination, and environmental concerns as central modes that generate the social life of urban infrastructure.*

Current research into the meaning and working of infrastructure demonstrates that the materials and technologies of built structures are inherently social and dynamic. Harvey (2010), for example, analyses the role of cement for changing social relations in Peru as it is implemented in road construction and civic buildings. Going beyond the singular material and object, Hein (2018: 922) outlines how Rotterdam's "petroleumscape" – or the built environment that emerged from the oil industry, "shape[s] our value systems, imaginaries, and decision making." In this case, oil, as main energy source, left traces in the landscape which pose serious challenges for creating a post-oil society.

With such studies in mind, we suggest that adding an architectural perspective to infrastructure studies reveals how buildings and spaces not only symbolize power relations but are in fact the very *design* of power.

> *Shopping malls, promenades, apartment buildings, car parks, and tram stations are shaped by political, technological, and economic factors guiding their design and implementation.*

Once constructed, urban infrastructures communicate ideas and images about society; they reinforce local identities of place; they produce ethnic, class and other boundaries; and their form and symbolism engender uneven heritage-making processes. This has happened in places such as Dhaka, Beijing, and elsewhere, where the recent declaration of buildings as heritage sites placed a considerable burden on the rightful owners who often do not have the financial means to follow government restoration plans.

Urban infrastructure landscapes are also increasingly linked to concerns of climate change, as debates around energy transitions show. Environmentalists have begun to criticize the large CO_2 emissions caused by practices to air condition buildings. Considering the replacement or retrofitting of thermal infrastructure in houses, it becomes evident that energy supply is embedded in an infrastructural network that connects various buildings to one another. As such, energy transitions might be best assessed through an urban perspective, bringing together architectural and infrastructural considerations. As Stephen Collier (2011) shows, the relationships between buildings and water pipes is a social condition in Russia, and the maintenance of heating infrastructure that provides warm housing has reinforced citizen-state relationships in the Post-Soviet period. In a similar vein, Madlen Kobi (2020) engages with the heating system in Northwest China to demonstrate how warming bodies is not only a biophysical process, but embedded in larger political settings of architecture, biopolitics, and territoriality.

> *Infrastructure, we argue, depends on and becomes visible through architecture. It mediates between sustainable design, natural resources, material networks, and social lives.*

Taken together, infrastructure and architecture constitute the basic material

fabric of contemporary cities: the choice of pipes leading from and to buildings to provide water and sewage solutions for private homes and offices; the installation of solar and energy storage systems to power electricity grids and enable heating and cooling facilities; and the integration of mobility systems to connect houses and recreation areas to underground car parks, vehicle sharing services, metro networks, railways, and other public modes of transportation. In all such cases, the complex work of repair and maintenance is essential to avoid failure and support contemporary forms of living.

Our forthcoming issue of *Roadsides 004: Architecture as/and Infrastructure* brings together innovative work from anthropologists, architects, urban planners, engineers, geographers, and environmental scientists to expand understandings of architecture and infrastructure as dynamically evolving social relations between humans, design, materials, technologies, capital, the environment, and the state.

The CfP for *Roadsides 004* can be found _. Abstracts (max. 200 words) should be sent to nadine.plachta@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de and madlen.kobi@usi.ch. Deadline for the submission of abstracts is March 31, 2020. To peruse all issues of *Roadsides*, visit the journal's website: https://roadsides.net

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Feature image (cropped) by Nadine Plachta.

The Corona Diaries

Ian M. Cook
May, 2020

Welcome to The Corona Diaries from Allegra, first recorded in April 2020 as part of the Corona thematic thread.

The diaries, published once a day, spoke to many of the same themes and topics that those writing for Allegra at the time were also concerned with. These included the pandemic-induced changing relationship to the city and its public spaces (Stallone 2020), overwork and under-appreciated invisible labour (Cook 2020), middle-class privilege during confinement (Blanco Esmoris 2020), the need

to think about public good, social justice and solidarity in political terms (Billaud 2020) and how anthropologists and social scientists more generally can reimagine our research (Kiderlin, Hjalmarson, and Ruud 2020) and prudently assert our importance in public debate (Beyer 2020).

Now we offer up the diaries again, reimagined at the end of the year in a new format.

You can now play multiple audio files at once. Make your own meaning. Explore your own cacophony. Go on, try it.

(unless you're using a mobile phone, then it won't work well, sorry!)

Mohira – April 22 – Bishkek	Susanne – April 7- Helsinki	Priyanka – March 27 – Mysuru
Panagiota – April 4 – Barcelona	Goodbyes	Aditya – April 20 – Bengaluru

Nonlinear Diaries

As you can hear, in April 2020 people were speaking a lot about corona. I asked seven diarists – one per day of the week – to reflect on the following questions:

How do we socially and culturally adapt to isolation? How do we experience empty spaces? Are new forms of solidarity emerging? How does it feel to have to work in hospitals, assembly lines or shops when others stay at home? What new

questions are we asking ourselves about our parenting and being a child? What new forms of exploitation emerge from the increased digitalisation of work? What new spaces of freedom have emerged? How can we understand social media's role in the pandemic? How are our modes of communication changing in general? What role does humour play in our new shared experience of an absurd situation without precedent?

It was quite intense, at least for me, to listen to these short but intense personal political performances each night before going to bed.

Wednesdays: Mohira Suyarkulova, Sociologist, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

Thursdays: Justin Spike, Journalist, Budapest, Hungary

Fridays: Priyanka Krishna, Urban Researcher, Mysuru, India

Saturdays: Panagiota Kotsila, Political Ecologist, Barcelona, Spain

Sundays: Tamara Buble, Public Education Executive Officer, Zagreb, Croatia

Mondays: Aditya, Content Developer, Bengaluru, India

Tuesdays: Susanne Ådahl, Medical Anthropologist, Helsinki, Finland

I thought the method of audio diaries would offer richness and depth in real time, capturing diarists own narratives about their own experiences, and opening avenues to unexpected data (Bernays, Rhodes, and Jankovic Terzic 2014), and for the most part this was the case(1).

Though I called them 'audio diaries', some of the diarists and listeners preferred to refer to them as 'podcasts', which they certainly began to feel like when integrated into digital podcasting infrastructures like Apple Podcasts, Spotify and SoundCloud. However, these platforms made it impossible for our Kyrgyz Republic based diarist, Mohira Suyarkulova, to listen as all platforms were prohibited where she lived.

This compelled us to think we should upload them directly to the Allegra site.

However, now it no longer made sense to follow the traditional serial logic of podcasting. It worked well at the time as it allowed listeners to follow the daily changing updates in the lives of our diarists, with listeners receiving the audio files directly to their phone through RSS feeds. Eight months on, however, we are no longer bound by the need for linearity or timeliness.

As such, whereas The Corona Diaries was originally 'an exploratory, curated academic project' similar to other pandemic audio projects, such as City Road's brilliant 'Listen to the City in a Global Pandemic' (see: Rogers et al. 2020) it can now become something else; be given a new lease of life.

Inspired by multimodal anthropologists' call to create multisensorial, performative and inventive anthropological knowledge rather than only that which is textual, representative and descriptive (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019), this reimagined corona diaries is noisy and messy. It allows the user to navigate their way through the five entries by each of the seven voices. In this sense, it embraces multimodal anthropology's potential to create an 'entanglement' –"an adventure, a desire line through a data … [that] calls to mind excitement, risk, confusion and matters of the heart." (Nolas and Varvantakis 2018, 2).

More directly, I ~~stole~~ borrowed the idea from Claudiu Cobilanschi, a Romanian artist who did something very similar with Ceaușescu's speeches (sadly no longer online).

Mohira- April 1- Bishkek	Aditya – March 30 – Bengaluru	Tamara – April 5 – Zagreb
Panagiota – April 18- Barcelona	Mohira – April 8 -Bishkek	Susanne – April 21- Helsinki

Panagiota – April 11 – Barcelona	Priyanka – April 3 – Mysuru	Priyanka – April 24 – Mysuru
Panagiota – April 25- Barcelona	Aditya – April 6 – Bengaluru	Susanne – March 31- Helsinki

Online Auscultation

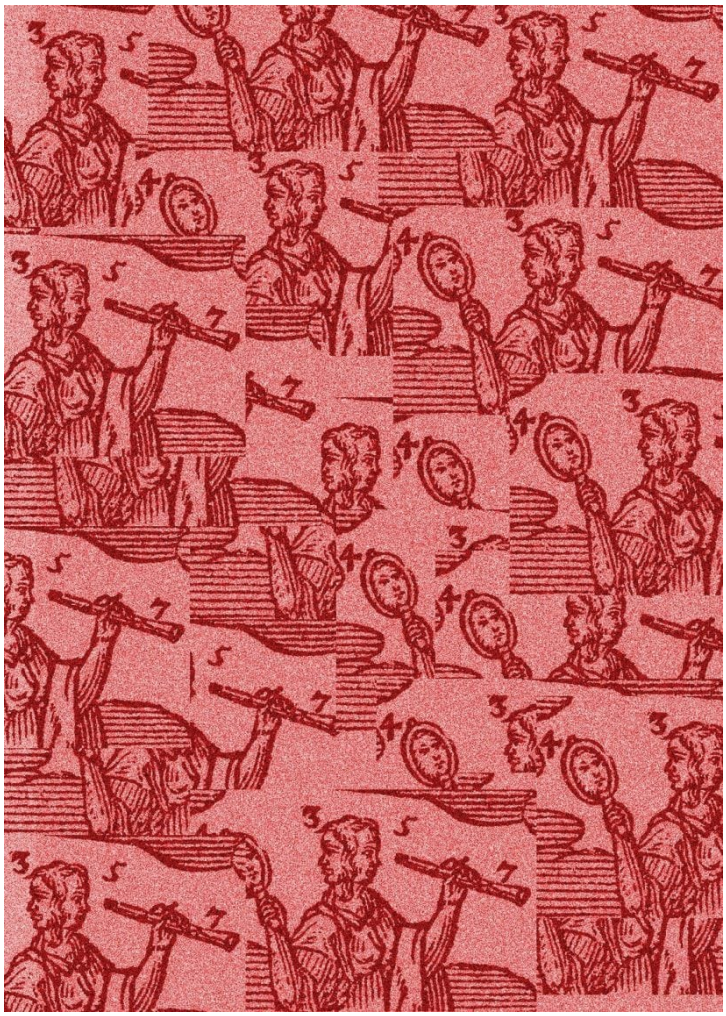
More than half a year on from the original diaries, we're still speaking about corona, although in a different tone. Maybe a bit more tired, a lot sadder, and slightly more sceptically hopeful. But are we also listening differently?

Back in Spring 2020, the podcast Das Corona Virus from Norddeutscher Rundfunk with virologist Christian Drosten became a hit in the German speaking world. It was suggested that its popularity lay in people being able to get reliable updates about the virus direct from a scientist (Schmitz 2020).

Subscribing to this type of podcast is to engage in a listening practice that seeks to hone in on a particular type of 'expertise', whilst cutting out the surrounding noise (from traditional media, armchair experts on social media and politicians). This digitally-enabled listening is different from the listening we do when we hear experts' rushed soundbites on the radio: it's more concentrated and selective

from the listener’s side.

Such new ways of listening develop alongside the emergence of new auditory technologies, in this case RSS feeds and smartphones. Such listening practices change in relation to the affordances offered by these technological changes, but also in relation to the cultural and historical contexts from within which they emerge, including any auditory predispositions (Rice 2015).



Listening, formed through the intersection of technology and culture, can also be diagnostic. Think of how doctors practice auscultation – listening to the internal sounds of the body, such as the lungs using the stethoscope. As Tom Rice (*ibid*) argues, such listening practices are key to the production of medical knowledge, but can also destabilise it. Moreover, as he shows through hospital-based

ethnography, such modes of listening require both a proximity and detachment. Doctors need to get close to and touch the patient but are also separated by both the instrument they listen through and the need for detached state of mind.

I was reminded of this near-far dialectic when thinking about what type of listening takes place when we subscribe to updates about a deadly global pandemic by someone like virologist Christian Drosten. Listeners to such podcasts make an active choice to subscribe to reliable sober detached updates that are at the same time delivered through the proximate intimacy of the podcasting medium (Llinares, Fox, and Berry 2018; Spinelli and Dann 2019); they allow voices into their head, which are transduced by the technological apparatus of the headphones.

Panagiota – March 28- Barcelona	Justin – April 2 – Budapest	Mohira – April 16 - Bishkek
Priyanka – April 10 – Mysuru	Susanne – April 14 – Helsinki	Tamara – April 12 – Zagreb
	Justin – April 23 – Budapest	

Cacophonic Meaning-Making

The audio diaries rearranged here aim to engender a different sort of listening. One that invites listening with an added layer of agency. Not only a ‘listening to’ the audio diaries, nor only a ‘listening in’ to the lives of the diarists, but also a type of ‘listening for’ – a ‘listening for’ in which listeners can make their own

meaning through digitally-enabled combinations of voices recorded at different moments during the first suffocating lockdown.

Stop making sense. Start making noise.

Justin – March 26 – Budapest	Aditya – April 12 – Bengaluru	Tamara – March 29- Zagreb
Priyanka – April 17- Mysuru	Justin – April 9 – Budapest	Mohira – March 25 – Bishkek
Tamara – April 26 – Zagreb	Aditya – April 27 – Bengaluru	Justin – April 16 – Budapest

Concept & text by Ian M. Cook

Many thanks to the amazing technical assistance from Emilie Thévenoz & Sara Jormakka

Review

Would you like to review The Corona Diaries? We are currently soliciting open post-publication reviews. We are also happy to receive reviews of this piece. Please contact judithb@allegralaboratory.net for more information.

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(1) We did not expect being a diarist for Allegra to be inherently empowering (Jones et al. 2015), and recognised issues around confidentiality and oversharing (Williamson et al. 2015), but as the 'goodbye' entries revealed, the diarists found making the diaries a positive experience, even if, for some, it became another task to do within increasingly messy schedules.

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Music :

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