# Reflections during the Pandemic

Compiled and Edited By Dasarath Chetty

ISA RC10 Participation, Organizational Democracy and Self-Management

# Reflections during the Pandemic

Compiled and Edited By Dasarath Chetty

Dasarath Chetty
*President ISA RC10*
chettytd@gmail.com

Michela Freddano
*Secretary ISA RC10*
michela.freddano@invalsi.it

Volkmar Kreissig
*Treasurer ISA RC10*
vkreissig@gmx.net

# Contents

# Introduction

Dasarath Chetty
*President ISA RC10*

Covid 19 has presented myriad challenges to humanity and the social science community in particular, in terms of understanding how forms of social organisation, production, distribution and consumption have affected our ability to respond effectively and efficiently to what has variously been described as anything from a social calamity to a civilisational crisis, and how the future may be reshaped through increased state intervention, policy shifts, multilateral alliances, international solidarity and/or fundamental restructuring amongst other elements of a scientific re-imagination. Limiting this engagement to academics however seems to also limit the impact that social scientists through their intellectual pursuits are able to make on the real world. Engagement with non-academic actors and audiences and the general scientific community has seemingly become essential in the quest to encourage critical thinking and contribute to policies and programmes; also to demonstrate to the public that what sociologists do is not merely 'academic' (used in the vulgar sense of not being of practical relevance). The space for public and applied sociology has widened due to the pandemic.

One way of contributing is to write short papers using sociological insights, analyses and findings and distribute them as widely as possible and in our engagements with civil society, government and other social actors. Being more present in daily newspapers also helps. E-public sociology is a form of public sociology that involves publishing sociological materials in online accessible spaces and subsequent interaction with publics in these spaces. This was, in part at least, the reason I called on RC 10 members and others to contribute short articles in which they reflect on the current crisis. Within a period of two weeks, 19 submissions were collated, all of them included herein, which indicate different concerns and approaches.

In attempting to group these insights thematically it appears that democracy, neo-liberalism and the pandemic of global capitalism, social solidarity, self-management, humanism, the role of social science and policy intervention amongst others tend to come to the fore. I have therefore grouped the contributions under similar headings.

To begin this anthology, Gyoergy Szell's insightful backdrop, which is slightly longer than intended for the commentaries requested, is presented under the heading **'On Democracy'.** After providing a brief review of the history of pandemics and its social structural correlates Szell states that severe crises fundamentally changing society is the exception rather than the rule – reactionary outcomes are more often the result. However, both progressive and intensely conservative developments emanate from crises and human agency is an underlying feature of social change. William Robinson contends that the crisis presents an opportunity for the ruling class to resuscitate and deepen the neo-liberal order but also an opportunity for the oppressed to struggle for something akin to a global new green deal.

The section **'On Social Solidarity'** contains two articles although many other contributions in this collection also address questions of social solidarity as well. My piece written on 4 April for the general audiences that read Independent Newspapers in South Africa was widely published by the group. It draws attention to 'social distancing' as a misnomer for 'physical distancing' in an era that instead requires a sense of community, connectivity and human social solidarity. The crisis is also seen as an opportunity for humanity to embark on a more progressive trajectory despite the hegemony of neo-liberal politics and the ascendancy of the identity politics of the far right.

Heinz Suenker, citing Adorno, shows how the entrenching of neo-liberal policies and the concomitant decline of the welfare state has fostered the totally unequal distribution of "the well known cake." He then points to beacons towards the politicisation of consciousness in order to achieve an emancipatory perspective of solidarity.

Two conceptions of **'On Self-Management'** are presented through the eyes of Swedish and Serbian sociologists. Uros Suvakovic contends that the foundations of socialist self–management internalised by many Serbians prior to the collapse of 'Socialism' is an underestimated strength in times of a pandemic which has been exacerbated by the abandoning of the welfare state in Europe. Erik Lindhult reflects on why Sweden chose to rely on the Aristotlean 'phronesis' a reasoned, balanced capacity to act with regard to what is good or bad for humanity and the Swedish concept of 'lagom' which is reasoning and determining appropriate action in any situation. However, higher casualty figures in Sweden than in other Nordic countries questions the practicality of an approach based on self-management to one based on curtailing individual freedoms in the common good.

Three short pieces from India, Germany and Sweden are contained in the section '**On Participatory Democracy and Neo-liberal failure.'** PP Balan points to the strengths of central planning and democratic decentralisation in dealing with pandemics using Kerala's Kasargod District as an example of an effective response effort. Volkmar Kreissig argues that the unfettered quest for economic growth and profiteering causing social inequality, environmental degradation and human suffering is not a basis for sustainable development. Azril Bacal Roij reflects on personal circumstances as they relate to general history and the 'fragmented mosaic of reality' and concludes that the choice lies between democratic socialism and a 'digitalised Orwellian dystopian barbarism'.

In the section **'On Humanism'** , Ela Gandhi reflects on whether governments would use this opportunity to build humanism and improve the living conditions of people in the future or will it be more of the same i.e. profits before people. Similarly, Bobby Sinha sees Covid -19 presenting the opportunity for the resurrection of a human ability to practice a critical humanism in the quest for 'compassionate interconnectedness and global well- being.'

**'On the Role of the Social Sciences'** Nirmala Gopal asserts that the challenge confronting academics is to transcend 'talk-shops' into 'intervention-shops' with special reference to an interventionist agenda necessary in order to provide psycho-social support to women in informal settlements. Michela Freddano asserts that the pandemic has revealed how science does not produce absolute truths, if anything it reveals how deficient old paradigms were. On the positive side emergencies foster innovation and create grounds for a renewed global citizenship and a new role for social science. The third contribution in this section, by Jaya Govender, provides insight into how during covid-19 science faces political attack and how the calamity undermines the capitalist social compact and creates conditions for reorganising the social means of production.

**'On Policy'** contains three pieces on

problematizing Italian policies, international cooperation and implications for democratic politics in South Africa. Donatella Poliandri notes that policy choices don't necessarily make the underlying social problems explicit and that the approaches used by governments reflect national and historical specificities which are based on deep seated cultural assumptions. Jaimal Anand explains South Africa's approach to the pandemic, how lockdown is being managed and why international cooperation is essential as evidenced by the 'Alliance for Multiculturalism.' Paul Kariuki contends that optimal participation of all stakeholders as intended by the SA Constitution is imperative for an even-handed approach to the pandemic. He expresses the view that the 'new era of concern' should lead to a strengthening of the public health system, social security and economic stability.

The contribution by Sheetal Bhoola **'On Food'** reflects on the contrast between food insecurity faced by the majority of 'have-nots' and the recreational use of food preparation during lockdown for the 'haves' in South Africa.

In the last section **'On The Social Determinants of Health'** Katrinell Davis describes and criticises the politics of Trump and the manner in which it contributes to the disproportionate effect of covid-19 on 'people of colour' in the USA.

**Dasarath Chetty (Editor)**
**Durban, South Africa**
**4 May 2020**

## *On Democracy*

# 1. Covid-19 and Democracy

György Széll, Prof. em. Dr. (Former President of RC10)
University of Osnabrueck, Institute of Social Sciences, D-49069 Osnabrueck/Germany
Tel. +49-5443-8959; Fax. +49-541-969-4600; Email: gszell@uos.de
Editor-in-Chief Asian Journal of German and European Studies
Conseil Scientifique Fondation du Camp des Milles <http://www.campdesmilles.org>
Wissenschaftlicher Rat der Osnabrücker Friedensgespräche <http://www.ofg.uni-osnabrueck.de>
<https://www.sozialwissenschaften.uni-osnabrueck.de/mitarbeiter_detailseiten/szell_gyoergy.html>.

György Széll

After each crisis we ask ourselves: Can we learn from history? We will ask this question again after the major effects of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic are over. To begin let us have a look into the history of pandemics (Snowden, 2019). Every human being has about 2 kilo of bacteria in his body. We live in a kind of symbiosis with, and could not even survive without them. There is the hypothesis that Covid-19 has been transmitted from bats via pangolins, by consumption, to humans. Humans always ate wild animals; actually we started our civilisation as hunters and gatherers. Apparently we adapted to the risks. There is now a proposal to kill all bats to eradicate corona viruses. But there are about 6,000 species, and they serve agriculture by pollinating plants. The famous German bacteriologist, Robert Koch, proposed to destroy all wild animals to reduce bacteriological infections in 1908 (Uekötter, 2020). A crazy idea because diseases and viruses have accompanied humanity since its very beginning. Out of several million viruses only about 5,000 are known in detail today. They have existed much longer than humanity, since life on earth began, i.e. several hundred million years ago. Viruses will therefore never be eradicated. We have to adapt ourselves – with or without vaccination. So we have to find a modus vivendi with them. But under what conditions? The German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, declared on this occasion: "There has never been so much knowledge about ignorance." (2020)

Some 20-30,000 people died every year in ancient Rome through diseases, although at that time Rome was regarded with its toilets as the most hygienic place on earth. However, no specific action was taken, as the dead were quickly replaced by new immigrants. The bubonic plague in the 14/15th centuries diminished the European population by one third. It was the worst pandemic in human history so far. Europe needed several centuries to overcome the consequences. Nevertheless two positive developments were the result of this catastrophe:

1.  New religious movements emerged, which eventually led to Protestantism, i.e. another schism within Christianity, which strengthened the individual, and
2.  the creation of modern medicine, based on Arabic knowledge, which contributed to Enlightenment and the prolongation of life expectancy.

Certainly, the plague alone was not responsible for this evolution. There were other elements as well, too long to explain here (cf. e.g. Braudel, 1992). The Europeans introduced infectious diseases to Latin America after its conquest at the end of the 15th century, which decimated the indigenous population by 99 %. These diseases were the most deadly weapons, although not deliberately used. The indigenous population never recovered from this collateral damage. No lesson was ever learned, except perhaps biological warfare.

Europe was regularly infected by cholera epidemics until the 1950s. "One of the major contributions to fighting cholera was made by the physician and pioneer medical scientist John Snow (1813-1858), who

in 1854 found a link between cholera and contaminated drinking water." So, modern hygiene started. Nevertheless, "cholera still affects an estimated 3-5 million people worldwide and causes 28,800-130,000 deaths a year." (Wikipedia, 2020)

The most dreadful pandemic in modern times, i.e. the so-called Spanish flu in 1918/19, caused some 50 million deaths out of a world population of less than 2 billion. This mortality rate put into relationship with today's world population would mean some 200 million casualties. Eventually Fascism and Stalinism emerged hereafter, leading to World War II with some 60 million casualties. But positively also international organisations were created like the League of Nations Health Organisation (LNHO) in 1919, the predecessor of the UN World Health Organisation. „But with that realization came hubris. In 1948, US Secretary of State George Marshall confidently declared that humanity was about to eradicate infectious diseases from the Earth." (Campanella, 2020) There was a Delphi health forecast – i.e. experts were asked in their relevant field – in Japan in the 1990s with the result that in 2020 all diseases will be eradicated. (Cuhls, 1998) A utopia, which unfortunately will never come true. 'Normal' flu viruses kill between 250,000 and 695,000 people globally every year – without making headlines (Paget et al., 2019). Corona viruses accompany humanity since some 600 years, and are responsible for about 15-20 % mortality of lung infections annually. SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2002/3 and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus) in 2012 were predecessors to Covid-19, also called SARS 2. So far no vaccination exists for both infections, therefore it is very doubtful if one for Covid-19 will be found (Ma & McCarthy, 2020). And even if appropriate medications and vaccinations are available there is the risk that vested interests will appropriate them via patents, and by that increase social inequality (Michaels, 2008).

South Korea and Taiwan have drawn consequences out of SARS and MERS pandemics, and seem to have overcome the Covid-19 crisis rather well until now. Germany too reacted to these two pandemics and developed an emergency plan in case of a coronavirus pandemic in 2013. However, this plan was never implemented. Nevertheless, Germany copes rather well with the Covid-19 pandemic (Klikauer, 2020).

Already the US CIA forecasted a virus catastrophe in 2008: "Consider the 2008 report, 'Global Trends 2025,' which was all but oracular. 'The emergence of a novel, highly transmissible, and virulent human respiratory illness for which there are no adequate counter-measures could initiate a global pandemic,' the authors warned. The threat, they added, would likely emerge 'in an area marked by high population density and close association between humans and animals, such as many areas of China and Southeast Asia.' Even with limits placed on international travel, 'travellers with mild symptoms or who were asymptomatic could carry the disease to other continents.'" (Harrington, 2020) Bill Gates also forecasted a further virus pandemic as lessons learnt from Ebola in 2015 (Gates, 2015a, b). In an interview he reiterates his argument: "Bill Gates: There's gonna be a pandemic every 20 years or so. Let's deal with this one first, though'" (Robitzski, 2020).

Definitely the Covid-19 is much more dangerous than the other corona viruses, although it is far from the casualties caused by pandemics as in the past. There are different strategies to cope with it, and therefore different results. The Swedish strategy to produce the so-called herd immunity failed enormously (Bergstrom, 2020). The United Kingdom and the USA tried the same at the beginning with the known results. Nevertheless there are definitely panic and overreactions, e.g. in India and South Africa, where Covid-19 restrictions cause more collateral damage than the pandemic itself. If millions of people die from hunger, non-treatment of other diseases the catastrophe will question the functioning of government. The German computer activist, Sascha Lobo, characterizes this approach as panic reason (2020).

 "… We must recognize that, in many ways, defending public health and defending democracy are two fronts in the same battle." (Gaspard, 2020) Certainly the containment is a severe incursion into freedom rights. However, as already 600 years ago with the plague it is the only way to restrict the explosion of infections. Conspiracy theories – as always in times of crises – spread more than ever before. This is not different today, but with so-called social media the damage is more severe. So, about one quarter of US-

citizens and French believe that the Covid-19 was deliberately or incidentally produced in Chinese labs (Mitchell & Oliphant, 2020; Peters et al., 2020). Probably the same people who believe that the earth is flat, and the universe was created only 6,000 years ago, as written in the bible, and not 14,8 billion as science confirms. For sure there is behind the imagination of scientists like Frankenstein using science to dominate the world. But it is very rare that a president of the most powerful nation spreads conspiracy theories himself.

Not long ago weapons of mass destruction, i.e. ABC-weapons, including biological warfare, were allowed. Actually the Germans invented them during the First World War.

But probably the most serious pandemic today is casino capitalism, i.e. an unrestricted market economy (Soros, 1998). It is killing millions of people through famine, lack of drinking water, hygiene, medical care etc. every year. The global financial crisis of 1929 (Black Friday) brought forward many authoritarian and fascist regimes. (Corner & Lim, 2016) After the financial crisis of 2008/9 banks were saved with hundreds of billions of US-Dollars of public money; the responsible people were never prosecuted, and business as usual continued, including exorbitant bonuses. As collateral damage, populism and neo-fascism spread worldwide. Today 'illiberal' or 'directed' democracies take the occasion of a viral turn to increase their rule (Gaspard, 2020). But, do democratic regimes cope better with the Covid-19 crisis than authoritarian regimes? It is very doubtful, if there will be more democracy in the world after the Covid-10 pandemic. Out of 167 ranked countries only 22 are full democracies right now (The Economist, 2020). The United States as well as Japan are 'flawed democracies'. And US-president Donald Trump stops financing the WHO, because he blames the organisation to be too China-friendly – however, a few days before: "Trump says the US and China are 'working closely together' in fight against coronavirus." (Chen, 2020) So, most probably the Covid-19 crisis will not only exacerbate social inequalities, but also increase international tensions, not only within Europe, but namely between the leading world powers. There is by the way a collateral benefit caused by Covid-19 restrictions: 'Normal' criminality has been reduced, although cyber criminality increased.

The political scientist Dani Rodrik asked: "Will Covid-19 Remake the World?" (2020) Definitely Covid-19 has led to a kind of civilisation crisis. The only question is if the world will change for better or worse. „For sure, that the post-corona-world will be another than before. Hopefully will it be, however, more capitalistic, entrepreneur-friendly and innovative." (Rhonheimer, 2020; translation by G.S.) As if it is not already so, and it is one of the reasons of the on-going crisis. But as we see – especially in the USA – in a pluralistic or even a polarised society there are quite different positions and value systems also in regard to Covid-19. On the one hand, after the first openings of malls shopping goes on as before. And we are Amusing ourselves to death, as the US-American sociologist Neil Postman wrote already more than thirty years ago (1985). However, it is understandable that after severe restrictions and confinement many people having survived want to catch up with the pleas-ures lost, and even live more intensely.

There is also a debate – namely from the extreme right and left – that the restrictions are undermining their civil rights. However, the three principles Liberty, equality, fraternity of the French Revolution from 1789 have to be balanced: Complete liberty means anarchy, complete equality means restrictions of liberties, fraternity – today called solidarity – is strengthening liberties and equality. Fortunately in any crisis there is not only egotism, which is spreading, but solidarity as well. But will solidarity sustain after the crisis?

At this occasion also the ugly anti-vaccination movement reappears. They do not and will not understand that it is not just taking risks for one's own life, but harming those of others. It is the same issue as with speed and gun control. This movement is accompanied with a fundamental distrust of science, if it means the need to change habits and values. Here again cognitive dissonance shows up: We only accept those scientific findings, e.g. new technologies, which seem to fit our own interests.

To summarize: That societies and human beings changed fundamentally after severe crises was the

exception, and limited in time. In most cases a conservative, reactionary turn happened. Citizens were looking more than ever for security. However, one thing, which has been learned so far from pandemics over the last several hundred years is the improvement of hygiene and medicine. But one issue will be at the forefront now: The commodification and with it exploitation in the health sector, or let us better say industry. In the past hospitals were run by religious, humanitarian and municipal institutions. Today it is quite often that capitalist companies control the sector looking for profits. Health has become a commodity, it is not a public good anymore. The consequences are: exploitation, bad working conditions, and low salaries. Therefore many foreigners work in the health sector in the rich West. So if the health care system and the care for elderly will be improved in the long run, is very difficult to foresee. Crises nevertheless have triggered conscientisation (Freire, 1970). It led many people to religious, irrational action, but on the other hand sometimes also to more and better science. Not too bad after all.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions the environment has been less polluted over the last couple of weeks, e.g. by less traffic, home office, video conferences/meetings etc. Nevertheless homo sapiens is a zoon politikon, a social being: We need social contacts not only via so-called social media. Insofar we have to find a new balance between pandemic control and environmental protection (Hennicke, 2020). How do we overcome the collateral damage? How to be better prepared? Which lessons can be learned? Who are the actors for social change for better? Trade unions, Fridays for Future, the researchers?

What we learn from history is ambivalent. After the global crises of 1973/1979 we found two contradictory developments: On the one hand the resurgence of neo-liberalism with the elections of Maggy Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl, and on the other hand the creation of Green Parties. Today we are confronted with populist, fundamentalist, anarchist, neo-fascist political movements and politicians as well as fundamentalist religious movements (Széll, 2020). On the other side are Podemos, Syriza, Fridays for Future and other citizen movements. The French philosopher Edgar Morin names therefore our species not homo sapiens sapiens, but homo sapiens demens (1992). After all Mark Honigsbaum called our times The Pandemic Century: One Hundred Years of Panic, Hysteria, and Hubris (2019). And in 2011 Nathan Wolfe wrote The Viral Storm: The Dawn of a New Pandemic Age. But the psychologist Steven Pinker discovered that humanity in its history over the last 10,000 years became less violent and calls this The Better Angels of Our Nature (2011). He demands Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress (2018).

The late Austrian future researcher, Robert Jungk, was asked at his 75th birthday where he gets his energy to struggle for the improvement of life. He answered: You know I am 80 % pessimist, and 20 % optimist, but for these 20 % I live and fight (1993). Perhaps this philosophy is also true for democratic participation! Researchers and practitioners from all over the world have worked for more than 40 years within the Research Committee 'Participation, Organisational Democracy and Self-Management' of the International Sociological Association in this endeavour. Let us continue, with more dedication!

Karl Marx proclaimed Socialism or barbarism! But as we should have learned after the experiences with really existing socialism it is better to ask for Humanism or barbarism!

Finally, as literature often tells us more about the human species than many social science studies, my recommendation to read during these times of confinement are two illuminating books by the Nobel Prize winners of literature: Albert Camus 'The Plague' and José Saramago 'Blindness'.

References
Bergstrom, Hans (2020), 'The Grim Truth about the "Swedish Model"', Project Syndicate, 17 April.
Braudel, Fernand (1992), Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century. Berkeley/CA, University of California Press, 3 vols.
Campanella, Edoardo (2020), 'The Invisible Killers', Project Syndicate, 10 April <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/the-invisible-killers-by-edoardo-campanella-2020-04>.
Camus, Albert (1948), The Plague. New York, Walter A. Knopf.

Chen, Evelyn (2020), 'Trump says the US and China are 'working closely together' in fight against coronavirus', CNBC, 27 March.

Corner, Paul & Jie-Hyun Lim (eds.) (2016), The Palgrave Handbook of Mass Dictatorship. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Cuhls, Kerstin E. (2016), 'Shaping the Future: Science and Technology Foresight Activities in Japan, with Special Consideration of the 10th Foresight', ASIEN – The German Journal on Contemporary Asia, # 140 (Juli): 103-130.

Freire, Paulo (1970), Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York, Herder & Herder.

Gaspard, Patrick (2020), 'Viral Authoritarianism', Project Syndicate, 13 April.

Gates, Bill (2015a), 'How to Fight the Next Epidemic', New York Times, 15 March.

Gates, Bill (2015b), 'The next epidemic — lessons from Ebola', New England Journal of Medicine, # 372: 1381-4.

Gates, Bill (2020), 'Transcript: Bill Gates speaks to the FT about the global fight against coronavirus', Financial Times, 9 April.

Habermas, Jürgen (2020), 'So viel Wissen über unser Nichtwissen gab es noch nie', Frankfurter Rundschau, 10 April.

Harrington, Kent (2020), 'The Spies Who Predicted COVID-19', Project Syndicate, 16 April.

Hennicke, Peter (2020), Corona-Pandemie und Klimaschutz. Wuppertal, Wuppertal-Institut.

Honigsbaum, Mark (2019), The Pandemic Century: One Hundred Years of Panic, Hysteria, and Hubris. London, Hurst.

Jones, Kate E.; Patel, N.; Levy, M. et al. (2008), 'Global trends in emerging infectious diseases', Nature 451: 990-993 <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature06536>.

Jungk, Robert (1993), Trotzdem. Mein Leben für die Zukunft. München, Heyne.

Klikauer, Thomas (2020), 'COVID-19 in Germany: Explaining a Low Death Rate', counterpunch.org, 31 March <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/03/31/covid-19-in-germany-explaining-a-low-death-rate/print/>.

Lobo, Sascha (2020), ,Wider die Panikvernunft', Der Spiegel, 18. März.

Ma, Josephine & Simone McCarthy (2020), 'There was no vaccine for Sars or Mers. Will there be one for the new coronavirus?', South China Morning Post, 22 February.

Michaels, David (2008), Doubt is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health. Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Amy & J. Baxter Oliphant (2020), 'Americans immersed in COVID-19 News', Pew Research Cen-tre/Journalism & Media, 18 March.

Morin, Edgar (1992), Method. Vol. 1: The nature of nature. New York, Peter Lang.

Paget, John et al. (2019), 'Global mortality associated with seasonal influenza epidemics: New burden estimates and predictors from the GLaMOR Project', Journal of Global Health, Dec., vol. 9 (2): 020421.

Peters, Michael A.; McLaren, Peter & Petar Jandrić (2020), 'A viral theory of post-truth', Educational Philosophy and Theory, 13 April.

Pinker, Steven (2011), The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined. London, Viking Adult.

Pinker, Steven (2018), Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress. New York, Viking.

Postman, Neil (1985), Amusing ourselves to death. Public discourse in the age of show business. New York, Viking Penguin.

Publons (2020), 'COVID-19 related publications' <https://publons.com/publon/covid-19/?sort_by=date>.

Rhonheimer, Martin (2020), 'Mehr Kapitalismus oder mehr Sozialismus: Der Streit um die Nach-Corona-Ordnung ist längst entbrannt', Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 25 April.

Robitzski, Dan (2020), 'Bill Gates: There's Gonna Be A Pandemic "Every 20 Years Or So. Let's Deal With This One First, Though"', Neoscope, 10 April.

Rodrik, Dani (2020), 'Will Covid-19 Remake the World?', Project Syndicate, 6 April.

Saramago, José (1997), Blindness. London, Harvill.

Snowden, Frank M. (2019), Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present. New Haven/CT, Yale Uni-versity Press.

Soros, George (1998), The crisis of global capitalism. The open society endangered. New York, Public Affairs.

Széll, György (2001), 'Risk and Reason – or the End of the Age of Enlightenment?', in György Széll & Wiking Ehlert (eds.), New Democracies and Old Societies in Europe, Frankfurt a.M. et al., Peter Lang: 63-72.

Széll, György (2020), 'Religions and Society', in Costantino Cipolla (a.c.d.), La Sociologia Sovranazionale di Roberto Cipriani, Milano, Franco Angeli: 109-128.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020), Democracy Index 2019: A year of democratic setbacks and popular pro-tests. London.

Uekötter, Frank (2020), 'Von großen Zahlen, stillem Sterben und der Sprachlosigkeit der Menschheit', Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, # 11/9. März: 11-19.

Wikipedia (2020), Cholera <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholera>.

Wolfe, Nathan (2011), The Viral Storm: The Dawn of a New Pandemic Age. New York, St. Martin's Press.

# 2. The Coronavirus and the Pandemic of Global Capitalism

William I Robinson is  a professor of sociology, global studies, and Latin American studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. As a scholar-activist he attempts to link academic work to struggles in the United States, in the Americas, and around the world for social justice, popular empowerment, participatory democracy, and people-centered development. His two most recent books are Into the Tempest: Essays on the New Global Capitalism (2018) and The Global Police State (2020).  His Facebook blog is: https://www.facebook.com/WilliamIRobinsonSociologist/

William I Robinson

The coronavirus may not have been caused by global capitalism, at least not directly, but it did pull back the veil of a global capitalist system that has been wreaking calamity on the poor majority of humanity long before the outbreak began.  We know from the sociology of disaster that the impact of natural catastrophes is fundamentally shaped by the social order in which they take place.  The obscene inequalities and savage depredations of global capitalism, not the bug, are to blame for the suffering that the pandemic has unleashed on billions of people around the world.

The economic meltdown triggered by the virus underscored how dependent we all are now on the globally integrated production, financial, and service system, controlled as it is by the transnational capitalist class (TCC) and its political agents in capitalist states around the world.  From U.S. President Donald Trump's criminal ineptitude in addressing the pandemic, to the multi-trillion-dollar bailouts for capital, the threat to survival that billions of precarious and informal workers faced as the global economy plunged, and the overwhelming of woefully underfunded and collapsing public health systems, the pandemic laid bare how it cannot be left to our rulers to resolve the crisis of humanity.

Irrespective of political differences among its ranks, the TCC has endeavored to shift the burden of the crisis and the sacrifice that the pandemic imposes on to the working and popular classes.  For this purpose, it has been able to count on capitalist state power.  Governments around the world have turned to massive new bailouts of capital with only very modest relief, if at all, for the working classes.  In all, the U.S. and European governments promised private corporations at least $8 trillion in loans and subsidies, roughly equivalent to all their profits over the past two years, in what The Economist called "the biggest business bailout in history."

The level of global social polarization and inequality before the pandemic hit was already without precedent. In 2018, the richest one percent of humanity controlled more than half of the world's wealth while the bottom 80 percent had to make do with just 4.5 percent.  Various United Nations Agencies reported as the pandemic spread that tens of millions were at risk of starving to death, several hundred million faced the loss of their jobs, and half a billion or more stood to be pushed into poverty.  The virus may not care about the class, ethnicity or nationality of the human hosts it seeks to infect but it is the poor and working classes who are unable to protect themselves from contagion.  In the teaming slums of the world's megacities social distancing was a privilege that was out of reach.  Millions faced death, especially in the Global South, not so much from the viral infection than from the lack of access to life sustaining services and resources.

The class character of the crisis could not be clearer.  The ruling classes set about to push policies to exploit every aspect of the pandemic for private profit.  In what defies imagination, the ultra-wealthy elite in the United States, for instance, saw their net worth surge by $282 billion in just three weeks of the pandemic,

according to a report by the Washington D.C. based Institute for Policy Studies. As these trillions of dollars accumulate at the very top, the crisis triggered by the pandemic will leave in its wake more inequality, more political tension, more militarism, and more authoritarianism. Social upheaval, civil strife, and mass popular struggles will escalate. The ruling groups will intensify their class warfare from above by extending the global police state to contain mass discontent from below as capitalist hegemony breaks down.

Even if deficit spending and Keynesian stimulus remain in place for the duration of the economic depression that will likely outlast the health emergency itself, the experience of the financial collapse of 2008 showed that governments recovered the costs of bailouts by deepening social austerity even as banks and corporations used bailout money to buy back stock and engage in new rounds of predatory activities. Yet neoliberalism simply does not have any more reserves with which to contain financial chaos and economic implosion. The implacable drive to accumulation will impede solutions to the crisis. Renewed capitalist stability, if it can even be achieved, would require a more profound restructuring – including the rebuilding of public sectors devastated by 40 years of neoliberalism – than the agents of financial and corporate interests, along with the liberal and social democratic elite around the world, could possibly accomplish or would even want to. Short of overthrowing the system, the only way out of the crisis is a reversal of escalating inequalities through a redistribution of wealth and power downward.

That will not come without a fight. The crisis has the potential to awaken millions from political apathy. Already in the first few months of the pandemic reports came in from around the world of mass protests, some of it spontaneous "food riots" but much of it organized resistance. In the United States, for instance, workers undertook a wave of strikes and protests as the virus spread to demand their safety, while tenants called for rent strikes, immigrant justice activists surround detention centers and demanded the release of prisoners, auto workers went out on wildcat strikes to force factories to shut down, homeless people took over homes, health care workers on the front lines demanded the supplies they needed to do their jobs and stay safe.

The pandemic marks a before-and-after turning point. We have entered into a period of mounting chaos in the world capitalist system. Short of revolution, we must struggle now to prevent our rulers from turning the crisis into an opportunity for them to resuscitate and deepen the neoliberal order once the dust settles. Our struggle is to push for something along the lines of a global Green New Deal as an interim program alongside an accumulation of forces for more radical system change. A Green New Deal, a call first put out in the United States, proposes combining sweeping green policies, including an end to fossil fuels, with a social welfare and pro-worker economy that would include mass employment opportunities in green energy and other technologies. A global Green New Deal may help lift the world out of the economic depression we have now entered as it simultaneously addresses the climate emergency and generates favorable conditions to struggle for a post-capitalist social order.

*On Social Solidarity*

# 3. Physical Distancing and Social Solidarity

Prof. Dasarath Chetty is President of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Participation, Organisational Democracy and Self Management and an Adjunct Professor in Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology where he conducts research and training in Public Participation. He is also a Board Member of MAHSA University, KL, Malaysia and a Visiting Professor at the Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Childhoods and Societies at Wuppertal University in Germany. He has a PhD in Sociology and is a former Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and former President of the South African Sociological Association.

Dasarath Chetty

Social solidarity is based on a shared set of values, norms, beliefs and the consequent patterns of behaviour that guide, facilitate and help achieve harmonious, peaceful and progressive patterns of social relations that serve the purpose of advancing the progressive trajectory of humanity.

Social solidarity cannot and should not stop at contrived, colonial and post-colonial, artificial geographical borders which define nation states. Because in reality the porous nature of these physical lines on maps, even if they are 'protected' by the highest walls in history whether it be in China, Germany, Palestine or USA, serve only to reflect the physical manifestation of the anti-thesis of a unified humanity.

These Maginot lines represent true testaments to the barbarism of the uncaring elites of human-kind hell bent on degrading the environment and neglecting the violently dispossessed for their own short term personal gain, power and avarice - the very bases of a social anomie in times of crisis. Covid 19 provides ample evidence of the obsolescent nature of these physical boundaries.

To paraphrase the South African Freedom Charter, the earth belongs to all who live on it. Whether in oil rich Saudi Arabia or Venezuela, gold rich Australia and South Africa, rare earth materials and natural gas rich Russia, water abundant Canada, cobalt and diamond rich DRC, oil and timber abundant USA the earth is filled with sufficient means to maintain life of all living things. However, elites appropriating for themselves the earth's resources because they 'own' it and live above it, mainly through vile conquest, looting and now unequal trade relations sets us on a course for social and even physical implosion.

As profit through financial speculation continues to grow as an alternate to profit making through production, coupled with the decline of industrial workers and the suffering of non-permanent and unprotected employees, the crisis of inequality worsens leading to increased degradation , humiliation and the augmentation of the precariat where casualised, unorganised servility has become the norm. Business unionism, cooption of union leaders, the inevitably corrupt political domain coupled with the demonization of humane socialism, and the ideological hegemony fostered and perpetuated by the mainstream media, by English as the language of the excellent and intelligent all serve to inhibit the human capacity to deal with Pandemics.

We are told by the experts that 'social distancing' is the vital key to dealing with the Corvid 19 pandemic. This misnomer may imply that people should stop communicating with one another; and certainly not gather in large groups (which is true because of the risk it poses). 'Social distance' is a measure of distance across social boundaries. The appropriate terminology used to warn people of the danger of corona virus is 'physical distancing'. It simply means take all necessary measures to maintain a physical distance between yourself and others – at least six feet. Maintain your personal space so that the risk of being

infected by microscopic droplets is reduced. But maintain social connectivity, maintain social solidarity, preserve a sense of community, do not socially isolate and let's strengthen our psychological well-being whilst maintaining the required physical distance and other sanitary measures so necessary to protect ourselves and flatten the curve.

The World Health Organisation finally tried to correct an early error of mistaking physical distance for social distance by stating that in these menacing times of the virus, we want clear physical distance (minimum two metres), but at the same time, we want people to remain close to each other 'socially'. But where does social solidarity begin and end? Without international solidarity, pandemics of the nature of Covid 19 cannot be eradicated. They cannot be eradicated by the neoliberals baying for smaller government with the outsourcing of essential services. Smaller government has less capacity to respond, as China has demonstrated, to international medical or humanitarian crises. They cannot be eradicated by the market driven exigencies of drug companies in the pervasive pursuit of shareholder value.

What is required is a patent free vaccine ; international cooperation of the best scientific resources the world has to offer rather than handing over health policy resources, and decision making capability to powerful private corporations unaccountable to the public. In a civilised world order the rich and powerful assist the poor not suffocate them. It was reported that French doctors suggested that the vaccine be tested in Africa! Iran is being denied medication through US sanctions; some refer to this as medical terrorism, but Cuba in the spirit of internationalism has sent doctors to Europe, South Africa and other parts of the world! China informed the world as soon as they knew of the virus, decoded it and shared the information. And yet as Noam Chomsky opines a 'sociopathic buffoon' calls it a 'Chinese Virus' claiming that it was clandestinely dealt with by an authoritarian regime. Someone needs to remind this President that a wall on the border with Mexico will not stop the virus!

Migrants, Africans, South Asians, the aged, children and subaltern groups have yet to experience the full impact of the spreading global pandemic. Social responsibility, self management, social compliance even with restrictions on individual freedoms all represent the correlates of a social solidarity based on humane internationalism, a world premised on the values of sharing , caring, benevolence, compassion and trust. Covid 19 is a civilisational crisis not a medical one. It is time to revisit the questions of whether permanent revolution resulting in a new internationalism is possible, or only incremental advances, and can there be democratic socialism in any one country in a period of the apparent permanency and savagery of hegemonic market relations.

Social resistance is always a countervailing tendency. Another world is possible.

*An edited version of this article was published by Independent Newspapers in various editions in South Africa.*

# 4. Society and social policy in times of Corona

Dr. Heinz Suenker M.A. is Rudolf-Carnap-Senior -Professor at the University of Wuppertal. Formerly he was there Prof. of Social Pedagogy/Social Policy from 1990 to 2016.. His research interests and publications include Western Marxism/Critical Social Theory, Theory and History of Social Work and Social Policy, Sociology and Politics of Education, Childhood Studies, Fascism and Resistance. He served as Secretary General and President of ISA/RC 10 and as Secretary General and Vice-Chair of IPSA/RC 21 (Political Socialization and Political Education), as Dean of the Department of Social Sciences of Wuppertal University where he was a member of Senate for over 15 years.

Heinz Suenker

What is currently happening worldwide is, in the way it happens and how it is received, processed and politically understood and shaped, to be related to - at least - Europe and perhaps even as a special feature to the Federal Republic of Germany, in terms of what determines its particular socio- political structures and processes.

The starting point is in a general way what can be called the state of this social formation today - historically grown after the end of fascism. In his essay "Versuch, das Endspiel verstehen", a Beckett analysis (in Noten zur Literatur II, Suhrkamp Verlag) about 60 years ago, Adorno stated in a way that is still true today for the structures of our society: "The irrationality of bourgeois society in its late phase is reluctant to be understood; those were still good times when a critique of the political economy of this society could be written, which it took at its own ratio. For it has now thrown this to the scrap heap and replaced it virtually with immediate disposition."

After the experiences of the last few weeks, it seems to make sense to rhyme events and contextualize what happened. It is important to me to make reference to what can be presented and analysed in relation to the last "financial crisis" and how it was dealt with.

We find an essential starting point if we take a description of what has been going on in these times. A new study entitled "The New Power Elite. Inequality, Politics and Greed" (by A. Shipman/J. Edmunds & B. Turner, London 2018) introduces the question of how it came about that a few extremely wealthy bankers and fund managers, whose magical money tree turned into sawdust in 2008, were given public money that others in the social and health sector could only dream of. And the authors ask (themselves) why democratically elected governments have allowed the 1% - or those occupying even more exquisite places in the ranking, around 0.1% - to escape the decline of the markets that would have traditionally killed their capital? And why did voters in America, Europe and Asia then rally behind members of the elite rather than traditional anti-elite parties? What made it possible for the unelected few to dominate politics and business so that all the progress made in the meantime in terms of democratization, work on social inequality and social mobility was reversed?

The answer clearly lies in the thesis of the establishment of neoliberalism in all areas of society and state - with the correspondingly well-known consequences for social and societal policy. The consequences for social and welfare policy were and still are - speaking for the Federal Republic of Germany - the abolition or dissolution of welfare state principles, as they had been fought for in West Germany since the end of fascism, with all their contradictions. It is therefore important to consider the state as a contested terrain also in the form of the welfare state. This process already began with the replacement of the SPD/FDP government (H. Schmidt) and the takeover of the government by the CDU/FDP coalition (H. Kohl) at the

beginning of the 1980s; at its core, as is well known, is the redistribution of socially produced wealth from the bottom to the top by means of social and tax policies. In order to intensify this process, however, it took the pseudo-red/pseudo- green government of the potential lumpen proletarians Schröder and Fischer, who acted in accordance with this habitus, to realize a neo-liberal policy in extenso, abusing the concept of reform - because in reality it was restoration and reaction - with the so-called corporate tax reform (end of the 1990s) and the so-called Hartz IV reforms. As analyses by the Düsseldorf-based "Institute for Macroeconomics and Economic Research" of the Hans Böckler Foundation have shown, this corporate tax reform alone has brought €75 billion into the coffers of companies and wealthy people every year since its adoption. - If you multiply this by 20, you arrive at an interesting sum, which, in view of the known decay of our infrastructure in many areas (see initial quote!), could have been used to do a lot of sensible things since then! - However, this is only one element in the redistribution policies that have been pursued in recent decades, and ultimately it can also be illustrated with reference to international developments (it is then always and everywhere a question of changes in tax policy, such as the abolition of wealth tax and the reduction of income tax rates, the increase of the VAT rate). This means that the well-known "cake" is again being distributed more and more unequally, so that we now have to state inequality relations as they were 120 years ago.

For the current situation of the Corona crisis it is therefore interesting to note, on the one hand, that nationally as well as in the EU context, huge sums of money are being spent at different levels and in relation to different institutions in order to deal with/resolve problem situations and, on the other hand, that the "winners" of the previous financial crisis brazenly refuse to work with a 10-20% credit risk - and this after having been showered with public money.

The question therefore arises as to how rationality and its manifestations are currently being worked with in or in view of the irrationality of late bourgeois or late capitalist society as captured by Adorno. This raises the question of how to work on a politicization of the consciousness of the members of this society in order to achieve an emancipatory perspective of solidarity, i.e. a perspective of world society?

In my opinion, this requires, on the one hand, working with number games - for example, in the form of multiplying the €75 billion mentioned above, in order to put the size of the money to be used in the Federal Republic of Germany of the European Union, which is now being discussed, into perspective.
On the other hand, it is necessary to scandalize the actions of the banks; this is especially necessary in view of the funds already thrown at them (there is no mention here of managers etc. still enriching themselves).

In terms of social analysis with reference to policies in different areas, it seems to me to make sense to pursue the question whether, in view of structural conditions, the comparability of neoliberalism and National Socialism - as the German form of fascism - should not be brought more seriously into the centre of scientific interests and analysis than has been the case so far?

For the sake of the emancipatory perspective of solidarity that has been hinted at, and in the defence against all possible conspiracy ideologies, I think it is important to recall a further assessment from Adorno's studies when he spoke in his lecture of 1968, "Introduction to Sociology" about the subject of sociological analysis, that this is what matters most, the objective laws of movement of society, which decisively decipher the fate of people, as they are a doom that has to be changed, and which on the other hand also contain the possibility, the potential, that it will be different, that society will stop being a constraint by just getting into it. This was connected with a specification: "Namely, the task of a dialectical theory would be to bring together exactly these two, but obviously conflicting moments in the social character of society, its incomprehensibility, its opacity on the one hand, and on the other hand its character, which is after all reducible to human beings and in this respect understandable, by deriving both moments from something in common, namely from the life process of society as it (originates) from the social work of society as a whole, and in this respect is therefore again understandable".

What is currently happening must therefore be understood and broken down as the result of various practices and interests (including unintended consequences). A special challenge - and in my opinion this makes an important difference to the "financial crisis" - is the task of establishing a mediation of natural sciences, medicine, as well as cultural and social sciences, so that one can draw reasonable consequences from this crisis and the ways in which this crisis is processed.

*On Self-Management*

# 5. Reflections on the pandemic: a view from Serbia

Prof. Uroš V. Šuvaković, PhD, Full Professor on Sociology at University of Belgrade - Teacher Education Faculty, Departmen of Philosophy and Socialc Sciences (Serbia). Corresponding member of Serbian Academy of Education, Belgrade. Research in the field of scientific methodology, political sociology, globalization studies and post-socialist transition of East and Middle European states, educational sociology and sociology of health and illness. Editor-in-chef of the oldest sociological journal ex-Yugoslavia Sociološki pregled/Sociological Review. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2141-8698

Uroš V. Šuvaković

The state of emergency in Serbia was timeously declared. A decision was rendered to quarantine all persons aged 65+at their homes, 24/7, whereas movement restrictions were imposed on others. Certainly, some exceptions have been defined.

As a result, the number of infected persons is significantly lower than in the countries in the region, with the rate of deaths as a result of COVID-19 being under 2% of the total number of cases.

A system of volunteers is in place, with the volunteers being mainly young and middle-aged persons, who bring groceries and other necessary things to the elderly and leave them at the doorstep. So there is either no actual contact with the elderly or a two-metre distance is kept, while all volunteers are fully equipped with surgical masks and gloves. Basically, this system was organised to make sure the lives of the highest risk category, the elderly, are saved.

Additionally, there is a ban on gatherings of all sorts – schools and faculties were closed, sporting events postponed, public traffic temporarily suspended, etc. All these initiatives are aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Nevertheless, the Internet and social networks are working non-stop, while TV or radio is on almost 24 hours in all homes. People await the latest news updates and instructions provided by experts and state authorities and they also watch and listen to various programmes to make the time go by faster. The theatres' web pages offer watching plays online free of charge; museums provide virtual tours of exhibitions; culture centres organize virtual visits to concerts and other events. Primary and secondary school students take classes via the television, but they also have online communication with their teachers; university students attend lectures with the aid of Internet technologies that allow two-way communication.

All this shows that the term social distancing which, without any critical review of it, we have adopted from Western European media, is wrong and coined under the influence of neoliberalism. As a matter of fact, thanks to information and communications technology (ICT), the social distance has narrowed whereas physical distance has widened, as requested by epidemiologists. Nevertheless, it is not only ICT that maintains the social distance while widening physical distance. Because of the selflessness shown by Serbian doctors and all other medical staff, large numbers of people applaud for a few minutes every evening from the windows of their flats. This is solidarity with heroes who put their lives at risk to save other people's lives. And during the several minutes of this applause, social distance actually does not exist; we are all a single collective and we sincerely hope and have strong faith that the outbreak will be conquered. The value of solidarity underlies the foundations of Serbian society. It is in the foundations of Eastern

Orthodox population as a vast majority, but it was also built in the foundations of socialist self-management and the non-aligned movement, the politics which the people of our country interiorised much more than originally thought by many, when socialism collapsed. It is specifically this solidarity that is now showing its true colours. But at the same time, it is also leaving behind sore scars of the absence of solidarity of the European West with Serbia. On the one hand, China and Russia gave a helping hand by sending not only medical equipment but also teams of their experts, whilst on the other hand, the European Union banned the export of medical supplies needed to prevent the spread of the virus in Western Balkans countries. Such moves will most certainly not be forgotten – neither those of the EU nor of Russia and China. The way everyone acted will be assessed through the prism of present time.

Still, this outbreak, although caused by a zoopathogenic virus, is not only the result of its ability to spread quickly. In the past, there were highly infectious viruses, such as this one is, nevertheless the speed at which they spread and their planetary outreach were not the same. There are multiple factors which have affected this and all of them have to do with people and the ideology of globalism. Humans attacking nature and its exploitation to an unimaginable extent have brought man in contact with wildlife in the way that has never happened before. People have, among other things, caused global warming, of which consequences are still unfathomable, especially if they are ignored, just like they are by President Trump. The motivation which urges people to attack nature is the same as motivation of the pharmaceutical industry regarding which drugs they will produce. It is – profit. It is a commonly known fact that investment in the production of medications used for treating infectious diseases – by which mainly the poor population is stricken – is far smaller than investment in cosmetics, of which Chomsky has also reminded us recently. This self-centredness of the rich part of the Planet – whose only concern is to maximise profits of multinational companies – is now backfiring specifically on the most developed countries. Neither cure nor vaccine for COVID-19 has been found yet, although research could have started as soon as the local SARS epidemic broke out. It was the financial aspect that weighed against this research because the disease broke out "out there, far away".

The selfishness of Western civilisation has backfired in multiple ways. Among other things, it turns out that Europe, under the influence of America and the neoliberal wave, has abandoned the welfare state thus, regrettably, questioning the issue of functioning of the public healthcare systems in a significant part of Western Europe. This is undeniably proved by thousands of deaths caused by this disease in Spain, Italy, Belgium, France, UK, Sweden, etc. The EU has also completely failed to demonstrate solidarity with these countries as well, to such an extent that when informed about the number of deaths in Italy, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen extended her "apologies" to this country. But the question here is what use this "apology" is to the deceased persons and their families. One cannot call it any other way but the paramount hypocrisy of the West.

The COVID-19 pandemic is of an acute character and caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Essentially, however, the disease mankind has faced for a long time is global capitalism, as an attempt at full negation of humanity and solidarity as the only values that can be the foundation of mankind. If it had not been swept by that disease, the world would now be substantially more resilient to challenges such as COVID-19.

# 6. Swedish participatory exceptionalism in the pandemic response- Aristotelian phronesis and the Swedish philosophy of "lagom"

Erik Lindhult is a senior lecturer in innovation management and entrepreneurship at Mälardalen University in Sweden. His main areas of research are participatory, collaborative and democratic innovation and action research, as well as entrepreneurship for a sustainable development of society. He is a board member of the Swedish Participatory Action Research Society (SPARC), Swedish Interactive Research Association (SIRA), and an associate board member of ISA, RC10 Participation, Organizational Democracy and Self-management.

Erik Lindhult

Sweden has received considerable attention for its participatory exceptionalism in its response to the pandemic. Instead of a general lockdown of business and society, and quarantine based on governmental orders, prohibitions and sanctions, the pandemic response strategy is relying on general recommendations of public expert authorities and the responsibility and common sense of citizens to adequately act in accordance with these recommendations. Internationally there is broad interest and curiosity in the approach of trusting citizens and organizations to do the right thing in following and applying general recommendations from public expert authorities and government, but also criticism for endangering the population through a response that is too lenient , too idealistic and unrealistic (i.e. a reliance on the common sense and good manners of responsible citizens). When some countries are tentatively opening up from the lockdown Sweden is receiving more interest as it has never been locked down and thus is already open.

WHO leaders have recently pointed to Sweden as an example for the future, dismissing the false view that the participatory strategy does not mean tight epidemic control. Time will tell if the participatory strategy will be considered successful. The evaluation of what is the best response in terms of outcomes can only be done when the pandemic has run its course. Why this more participatory approach to epidemic management in Sweden? I will here reflect on the Swedish participatory response from the vantage point of the Swedish philosophy of "lagom" and its link to ancient Aristotelian understanding of "phronesis".

A common Swedish idiom is that "lagom" is best. This saying has been used by epidemiological expertise and in media comments in explaining and legitimating the Swedish response. The response based on general recommendations from Swedish public health authority in the form of simple rules for all to adhere to is judged to be "lagom"; "Shutting down just right ("lagom") in order to cope with the whole course and, as soon as possible, start living again". Lagom as a form of reasoning, judgment and action on what is appropriate in a certain situation and has links to Greek thought of moderation and wisdom expressed as phronesis. It is, according to Aristotle, experience-based judgement: "a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man" (Aristotle, 1980; Eikeland, 2008). It is balanced judgement on what to do in a specific situation considering available learning and experience as well as uncertainties, risks and ignorance. It searches for and weighs arguments on what to do, here-and-now, considering the particulars of the situation. The many-sided sense of lagom can be recognized in Greek kairós important in phronetical judgment and action; the uniquely and timeously doing the right thing, for the right purpose, in the right way, to the right people, in the right amount, at the right time, in the right place, etc. That is, lagom as reasoning and acting considering the diversity of contextual contingencies, finding what the Greeks saw as the golden middle way. It is expressed in the Delphic Maxim "nothing to excess", by Artistotle commended as the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency. Lagom being the just right, a perfect moderation, or at least moderately perfect in face

of fallibility of human judgment, and limits in knowledge and openness to changing circumstances.

What is a lagom and phronetical pandemic response and strategy? Why did it emerge in Sweden? A point of departure is gathering of experience and expertise of pandemics learning and knowledge to be used as basis for response, and appropriate use of available experience and knowledge in public reasoning and advice. Phronetic public reasoning and advice must have sufficient acceptance and trust in the political community and among citizens in order to have broad authority in action. The Swedish public health authority, having a long history in developing expertise and providing advice, has become a center for the Swedish pandemic response and strategy. Before the onset of covid 19 It was not very visible or held in high regard, but has to a surprisingly strong degree been trusted to provide advice as basis for political action by government and citizens. The authority has not been much disputed in research community, by political opposition, the media or by citizens. This is important as phronesis can only gain authority if polemics and rethorics are not dominant, i.e. manipulation to win debate instead of all being open and weighing up arguments and trying to discern what is "just right" (lagom) for us here and now. Aristotelian, more collaborative, politics oriented towards common advantage is a precondition for legitimizing phronetical policies and practices and vice versa. I see a social soil for phronetical approaches in Sweden considered to be a high trust society, trust in public authority, in science and in reasoning and common sense expressed in a lagom philosophy looking for the "just right" middle way. A phronetic approach shows trust in citizens to use their common sense, their capacity for phronesis, in doing the right thing in each situation. Such respect gives room for responsibility and virtue to grow building phronesis as distributed capacity among citizens to reason and act adequately in each, unique situation.

The Swedish way is not very different in achieving satisfactory social distancing, it is just lagom. And more phronetical in reliance of appropriate science based expertise, political collaboration based on the advice of this expertise, and the involvement of citizens. The important dimension is that it is participatory, in a way that participation is a core dimension of reasonable public and common response strategy. It relies on good manners, ethics and the common sense of organizations and people to act wisely in each situation. Social distancing is the key. Locking down a city, region or country, and putting citizens and organizations in quarantine is a rather blunt weapon in the toolbox for achieving social distancing behavior among citizens. Why not involve the citizens, businesses and civic organization in achieving wise public responses, mobilizing the practical wisdom of all.

On the other hand, acting with moderation in extreme situations may be too weak r a esponse. Acting with moderation, lagom, may mean not acting too hastily before wisdom in the situation, lagom measures, has been discerned. At this point in time (30 April 2020) Sweden has significantly more infected cases and causalities than neighboring Nordic countries. Maybe lagom was not the best approach? Maybe earlier lockdown like other Nordic countries with strict enforcement, testing and infection control could have more efficiently suppressed the epidemic in Sweden? Was the Swedish lagom response emerging from a situation where the virus already was spreading out of hand? With limited preparedness, lack of protective equipment and testing capacities relying on the capacity of people was the most timely option? It is part of phronesis of continuously questioning its arguments and judgments. Tegnell, the state epidemiologist at the Swedish Public Health Authority and main figure behind the Swedish approach,   does not worry whether Sweden has chosen the wrong strategy, stating that "most important is to try to do as best as one can based on actual state of knowledge". He is not convinced that the Swedish strategy is the right way to go; "we are pondering continuously on it here in the authority. What can we do better? What can we screw on and turn?" Trying to be phronetic is a humbling experience in crafting a participatory approach to national epidemic management.

References
Aristotle (1980). The Nicomachean Ethics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Eikeland, O. (2008). The Ways of Aristotle – Aristotelian Phrónêsis, Aristotelian Philosophy of Dialogue, and Action Research. Bern: Peter Lang Publishers.

*On Participatory Democracy and Neo-liberal failure*

# 7. Covid-19 Success Stories: Behind the curtain - Gram Panchayats in the making of the "Kasargod Model" of Kerala

PP Balan, is presently working as a consultant in the Ministry of Panchayathi Raj,New Delhi ,India. Earlier he had served the Kerala Government in the capacity of Director of the Kerala Institute of Local Administration for a period of 10 years. He started his career as a teacher in a college and later became the elected head of a local government in Kerala.

PP Balan

The "Kasargod Model" , implemented in a district in Kerala, where Covid-19 growth has been much flatter than the national average has been praised for its effectiveness. Kasargod stands distinct with a progressive decline in infections and is therefore acclaimed as one of the success stories of the  containment exercise.

Kasargod, the northern district of Kerala reported the third case of Covid-19 in the country when an MBBS student of Wuhan University, China was airlifted on Feb 6, 2020. The initial attempt was to trace the 150 odd contacts which the District Collector and his team were able to identify. The situation became grave when people in large groups returned from the gulf countries many of them caught during their travel. The situation became worse when many of them reached their homes after spending three or four days in their relatives homes in the nearby districts. The District Collector and officials worked tirelessly to prepare the contact chart and 169 positive cases were identified finally. A total number of 17,373 persons were quarantined. On an average 100-150 samples were tested everyday. The medical college in Kasargod with 200 beds and ICU facility were operationalized within a couple of days. Meanwhile, the State Govt. appointed one co-ordinator to oversee their activities. A plan of action was prepared and Section 144 was imposed.On 28 April, when this study report was prepared, the number of corona patients have come down to 25 from the earlier number (March third week) of 169. One basic principle is to be kept in mind is that the State has cherished lifelong health system and high literacy rate among the people.

Key features of the moment against the virus
i.      Strenuous and combined efforts of the district level team co-ordinated by a special officer with District Collector, District Medical Officer, Superintendent of Police and Local Self Govt. Institutions.
ii.     Maintaining law and order in the entire district and making the people obey by awareness and later by imposing Section 144.
iii.    Common coordinated action plan (minute to minute details) was drawn up with proper monitoring system.
iv.     Campaign on social distancing namely, "Break the Chain".
v.      Core teams were formed with commanders to rush to various areas and take quick action.
vi.     Arranging facilities for foolproof contact training, quick testing, hospitalization and quarantine facilities.
vii.    Strong check on hoarding and black marketing with provision of the availability of essential goods  in every nook and corner of the district.

        Specific role played by Panchayats:
Gram Panchayats consist of a minimum of ten elected ward members and three nominated members established to ensure rural development and people's participation in local government.

i.    Panchayats (Councils of the five) initiated strong public awareness programmes in all the Gram Panchayats of the district. Special care was taken in the Covid-19 affected 15 Panchayats.

ii.   All the Panchayats prepared Disaster Management Plans in the month of January 2020 itself and this helped them to go ahead with activities.

iii.  The Panchayat Level Working Group was constituted with the Panchayat President serving as its Chairman and PHC doctor as its Convenor. The District Collector and District Medical Officer gave their technical guidance.

iv.   The Formation of Ward Level Vigilance Committees with ASHA and Health workers and civil society members. Thus 688 ward committees started functioning. Further, to reach out to every house hold a local level safety committee was formed for every 20 households in the ward

v.    Special focus on social welfare component which included free food for guest (migrants) laborer and destitute (4479 migrant laborer get 3 times food daily).

vi.   53 community kitchens started functioning in the district with the support of 'Kudumbasree' giving free and subsidised food.

vii.  Collection of data of NRIs and NRKs those who came back home during recent days.

viii. Selecting buildings for converting into corona care centres.

ix.   Providing special care for palliative care patients and senior citizens.

In addition, the 'War Room' was arranged in all the 15 affected Panchayats where positive cases were identified. At the district level, a special control room which is headed by the Deputy Director of Panchayats is functioning on a 24 hour basis. Counselling was conducted with a maximum of 8947 persons who are in the isolation wards. The District Panchayat has arranged call centre where medicine to the needy are made available in their houses. The elected members, officials, health workers, civil society members work day and night as per the direction from above and also as per the needs of the locality. It is with the whole hearted support of the Panchayats that Kasargod district could achieve good results in the fight against coronavirus.

The success story of Kasargod shows the strength of democratic decentralization. No doubt in the devolution status, the State of Kerala stands atop. The service sectors of health and education are the thrust areas of local self-governments since 1996 when the State initiated the people's campaign for the IXth Plan. A wide variety of programmes and interventions were made to ensure the quality of health and education. The health standing committee provided the platform for teamwork. The Joint venture between officials and elected representatives is further strengthened through constituting various committees such as working groups, vigilance committees and local level safety teams. This team work with the involvement of the people helps a lot in combating the spread of coronavirus in the district.

# 8. Limits of growth and the Corona virus pandemic

Prof. Volkmar Kreissig has taught extensively at various universities around the world in areas of business management, industrial sociology and applied sciences. He was Advisor at the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in Bulgaria and headed large German and European Aid Programmes in Belarus, Russia and Syria. He had affiliations with such universities as Belo Horizonte/Brazil; Tokyo; Wakayama/Japan; Sofia/Bulgaria; Hong Kong; Minsk/Belarus; Taipeh/Taiwan; Vientiane/Laos; St. Petersburg, Tjumen/Russia; Paris Ouest X Nanterre/France. He is Adjunct Professor at TTUC in Voi Kenya and currently teaching in Moldova at the State Agrarian University Chisinau as a "DAAD-Senior-Herder-Professor" and has published more than 100 scientific articles.

Volkmar Kreissig

At the beginning of the 1970s Denis Meadows dealt with the "Limits of Growth". He warned impressively about the uncontrolled growth which has led humanity into the deep crisis and to the boundaries of her earthly possibilities of existence. There was no world trade cycle policy which offers new creative possibilities in the economic, political and social arenas.

Meanwhile the former "Eastern bloc" has broken down. Critical discussion connected with "limits of growth" was neglected and in its place came the neoliberal mass consumption model. Socialist and with other alternative social models with related ideas got lost or were consciously sacrificed for the "new" neoliberal "unlimited growth" thinking. The "free market" would direct anyway all necessary requirements itself. Planning of development should not be necessary. The social welfare state policy was challenged by the neoliberal rhetoric. The attempts of the US-president Obama, to introduce a health insurance for all US-citizens, were rejected or undermined by neoliberal arguments. For developing countries such ideas of minimum wages and increased expenditure on social welfare and health care were in any case illusion because of a lack of economic possibilities and importantly a lack of political will.

Presently without state influence and planning the battle, under democratic control, against Corona crisis would be not at all possible. The free market has not "recognized and reflected" on the pandemic dangers and has not reacted independently with an alternative politics. It needs a new economic and social policy, bearing in mind challenges of the modern time - the globalization and the future of the humanity, including fight against other crises like war, poverty and misery with adequate new social-political paradigms.

The secretary general of UN recently feared the most awful effects beside the Corona Virus crisis for Africa are hunger and civil war. The social and political conditions on the continent, which constantly creates refugees mainly to Europe for economic, political, medical and other reasons ,are such that an effective fight against the virus is impossible.

In contrast to Africa, do suitable economic possibilities of pandemic fight exist in Germany, the European Union and other industrialised countries? There are a developed health services for the citizens and other preconditions necessary for defeating the pandemic. In comparison, the propagation and push back of the virus and other infections seems in Africa, South America and other peripheries hardly possible.

During the Ebola crisis - the author was just in Kenya - only limited assistance was given to Africa by the industrialised countries and even this was provided in a disorganized manner, mainly by volunteers and NGO's. As the Ebola calamity which is possibly more dangerous than the Corona Virus withdrew into the jungle of West Africa; there were only a few isolated cases of spillover in Europe and North America that were reached by this "African pandemic". Therefore the western health services led by politicians declared

that the preventive measures carried out there was enough.

The most well known German Poet Johan Wolfgang von Goethe wrote the following lines in his main drama: Faust":
"On holidays there's nothing I like better
Than talking about war and war's display,
When in Turkey far away,
People one another batter.
You sit by the window: have a glass:
See the bright boats glide down the river, Then you walk back home and bless its peacefulness, and peace, forever.
This Citizen's neighbor answered him: Yes! I like that too:
Let them go and break their heads,
Make the mess they often do so long as we're safe in our beds."

Policies of industrialized countries towards Africa and developing countries are today acting in the way it is described in Faust.

Corona Virus and its pandemic show us, the people living in industrialised countries, that "globalization" which is assessed often as the basis for development, is now an enemy of fast, uncontrolled distribution of the viruses. "Globalization" has only generated maximum profits for instance through the production of textiles under degraded and technically unsafe conditions, with unsuitable terms of employment as in Bangladesh, that are in no way comparable to European labour norms.. "Globalization" is cheap flower production in Kenya exposing the workers to the threat of pesticides etc.

Worldwide sourcing is the tenor „of modern production", with the central issues being reasonably priced and with suitable quality and „just in time"! This is also the "Corona Virus of indecent labor conditions"!

The world's professional football business with its modern gladiators many of whom call 20 million Euro a salary are waiting to get back to normal. The football labor force is traded with market values of hundreds of millions in transfer fees or sales.

These sums at the relevant slave market - or the Corona virus above all in industrial countries fought, is discussed in the same connection. Now there is discussion of European regulation of their excessive salaries and profits of marketing managers. The Football business has more value than the national budgets of some African state and their gross national products.

For 30 years neoliberal economists and political scientists have consciously pushed into oblivion the "skilful" German philosopher and economist Karl Marx who wrote in the "Quarterly Review: "Capital, flees tumult and quarrel and is of a nervous nature. This is very true, but not the whole truth. Capital is horrified by the absence of profit or very small profits. With suitable profit capital becomes daring. Ten percent certainly, and one can apply it everywhere; 20 percent, it becomes lively; 50 percent, positively reckless; for 100 percent it rams all human laws under his foot; 300 percent, and it risks no crime even if in danger of the gallows. If tumult and quarrel bring profit, both are encouraged. Proof: Smuggling and slave trade.

Nearly 50 years ago in the report of the club of Rome "Limits of Growth" an active discussion was initiated around the need to aim at new qualitatively better-balanced, ecologically acceptable forms of growth. This has been pushed in oblivion like other doubts about the political, economic and social course taken by the leading industrial states, G 7 ,in the world . The world degradations announced in the report "our common future" published 1986 by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland helped propagate the concept of "sustainable worldwide development".

Corona Virus reminds us: our world is indivisible, breakable and war economies, weakening existing regulation mechanisms in public health cause misery. The WHO, which was established by the UN founded in 1945, was accused by US-president Trump as worsening the crisis and not serving to negate the danger of pandemics.

Unscrupulous profiteering may not destroy our environment and be the measure of the things in all spheres of social life.

# 9. Biographies intersect with general history

Associate Professor-Researcher in Perú (1967-1980/2011-2015), Profesor-Investigador, Mexico (1981-1987), Retired Senior Lecturer, Sweden (1993-2006), Humanities Endowment Scholar, Otterbein College (1995). Visiting Lecturer at UCLA (1996) and Universidad de Córdoba, Spain (2001-2004). Board member of ISA's Research Committees 10, RC-05, and RC-26. Former member of Paulo Freire Institute (Brazil). Popular educator and cultural worker: project film-forum/poetry-forum on the "equal value of human beings". Published poems in Spanish, Swedish and English. Reside in Uppsala since 1986. Social activist. Professor, Doctoral Program in Life Long Learning on Peace Education/Culture of Peace, CIPAE-Puebla, México (2005-2020). Guest-Lecturer on Participatory Action-Research, Mällardalen University-SPARC (2017-2020).

Azril Bacal Roij

The enclosed lines convey my answer to Dasarath's brilliant initiative to share our reflections during the peculiar time and spatial circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic, in our personal lives and all corners of the world. A great opportunity to learn from each other! The first question that popped up is where to start, and then how to proceed? I decided to start in present time to frame my reflections in the here and now. Inspired by Marc Bloch, one takes a brief step back into the past to cast light on the present crisis situation, and concludes by looking forward to future trends and alternatives. I am sitting down in my working desk, looking at the trees and luscious nature through a big window devoid of curtains. Our local neighborhood association is struggling to save these trees. I live alone in a small two-room apartment. The Greek graduate philosophy student who rents one room went to Athens to spend the pandemic with her parents. She left in panic and angry with the way Swedish health authorities handle the pandemic. This strategy according to her was designed to get rid of people like me out of economic considerations. Nothing to do with saving as many lives as possible. There is some truth in her assertion. I belong to the high risk group, just turned 79, afflicted by chronic asthma, emphysema, Kol, and pollen allergic. The best credentials to succumb to this pandemic. One third of the reported deaths are found in this age-cohort, and Sweden is no exception to this pattern. The Swedish model of managing this health crisis situation has been highly criticized by insiders and external sources, because of its permissiveness. It has also been praised at the WHO. The mathematical projections of deaths ranges from 8,000 – 10,000 deaths as a minimum - to as high as 20,000 – 40,000 possible casualties to this merciless virus. Time has the last word on the matter. In this context, it's eerie to confront one's own mortality, even if not for the first time. I recall in this regard a line from Wallace Stevens: /"Death is the Mother of all Beauty"/. When confronting our finality, one is made keenly aware of the beauty and what is most valuable in life. Some of you might be aware that I write poetry, nowadays mostly Tankas and Haikus.

Let me share the following defying tanka, alluding to both the biological enemy and "Il fascismo eterno" decried by Umberto Eco.

Listened today
the first trill at daybreak, it
is Spring defying
the somber goosesteps of
virus and political pests

My days weave activities such as early yoga and Xi-gong to meet the day, academic work and activism. You might remember that I am currently editing an anthology on Transformative Research and Education with Emerald Publishers. At least four articles are written by RC-10 colleagues. Having finished my own article on active learning, participatory action-research and intercultural dialogue, I am nowadays translating a

provocative piece by Vicente Manzano-Arrondo at Universidad de Sevilla about the "Absurd University," providing at the end hopeful alternative projects of higher education under construction. My intellectual work is done daily at the library or at the university to break total isolation at home. In that way, the Swedish model suits me well with its relative permissiveness.

As an activist, I partake in the debate on the WSF 2021 in Mexico, Friday strike for the Future (FFF) at Forum Torget, downtown Uppsala, and in a series of webinar of social movements focused on the world after the pandemics. This subject is increasingly debated by global justice and environmental & climate justice movements. The beggar sitting in front of the coop is a daily reminder of the need to continue our struggle to construct other possible and sustainable worlds, based on solidarity, justice and peace. We are part of this struggle either as bystanders or as engaged academics.

On the personal and family fronts, if surviving this pandemics, I wish to share more time with my three adorable children and grandchildren. Moreover, as an individual with two divorces in my bag, and a long list of intimate relations in the past, I am ready to explore a new intimate partnership, hopefully a lasting one.

This period has been extremely enriching by enabling introspection and self-knowledge, time to look back and learn some from past mistakes. It refreshed my knowledge in biology, evolution, and health.

I also gained much clarity on the interconnections of all features in the web of life, including our socio-cultural constructs. It is not an easy task when under assault in the informational tsunami or fake news pandemics of our times. It's now timely as a sociologist to honor C.W. Mills who reminded us of the need to intersect our biographies with general history, and public issues with private lives. He also reminded us to provide the holistic frame to help the layman understand the fragmented mosaic of reality. My reflections have been much enriched by reading superb analysis of the causes, dynamics, and likely outcomes of this pandemics by Ignacio Ramonet, Naomi Klein, Göran Therborn, and Vicente Manzano-Arrondo, among others. As I am about to reach the limits of my article, what about the past? It would be redundant to expand on the destructive and unsustainable world-system built on post-colonial and class inequalities, industrial revolution, commercial agriculture, extractivism, consumerism, hooked on fossil and nuclear energy, etc. My account of the climate and refugee crisis of the 21st century, the rise of ethno-politics and neo-fascism, will soon be published in an RC-10 anthology edited by Dasarath. To conclude my thoughts on the matter, the post-pandemics world will depend on the outcome of an ongoing cultural war. The alternatives are democratic socialism or a digitalized Orwellian dystopian barbarism.

## *On Humanism*

# 10. A shift towards Humanism

Ela Gandhi, the grand daughter of Mahatma Gandhi, is now a retired Social Worker and activist.  Presently engaged in promoting Gandhian thought and encouraging the building of a culture of nonviolence through education projects and media. Served in the South African democratic parliament for 9 years and as Chancellor of Durban University of Technology for two terms.  Serves as co-President of World Conference on Religions for Peace and chairperson of the Advisory Council of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International  Centre for Interreligious Dialogue.

Ela Gandhi

Giuseppe Tognon of the Rome-Lumsa recently wrote on the concept of humanism and described 'Humanism as the "cultural sensorium" of societies… the way they rework their experiences and question themselves about every reality, superior, inferior or adjacent."

Covid 19 has captured the entire world and its devastating effect has resulted in countries having to take drastic actions impacting on the socio economic and religious sectors.  This  has resulted in rethinking and redeveloping our world view.  While the pandemic has brought about a sharp focus on the polarised society we live in, it has also brought into focus the environmental realities and the importance of the SDGs. Physical distancing has resulted in relationship issues and a rapid dependence on telephones, computers and generally social media as a means of communication.   Religious communities too have been forced to resort to these modes to carry out their services.  In some instances this has opened up windows of opportunities to communicate much wider than the immediate circle so that people from all over the world are now joining in on seminars, or webinars, devotionals, chats and so on.  But once again there are many marginalised from this mode of communication because of access issues.

As we look for responses we can either absorb ourselves in short term band aid methods of fighting the corona virus or we can look at long term changes needed in our communities to meet the challenges of the future. This is a challenge that people in decision making positions face.  Governments may put profits before lives, businesses may search for ways to profit from sales of much needed products and some people may look for ways to accumulate for themselves goods and funds meant for the destitute.  Clearly in this scenario our thinking would remain the same viz. accumulation of wealth as the central concern. On the other hand, despite the odds some governments have consciously put lives before profits. They are confronting the many imperatives, of saving the lives of millions,   trying to ensure that the poor are able to maintain themselves and comply, providing the destitute and vulnerable with food and basic needs so that they are able to comply.  Some  of the basic needs are access to water, sanitation, accommodation, decongestion of living quarters, food security and access to some technology e.g. cell phones.  The most important imperative however is whether to create systems that will enable better health care and better living conditions for the people in the future or to just put in place temporary measures that would merely meet the immediate needs of the people.

A humanistic approach is where one looks at the long term needs of the most vulnerable in our community and puts in place resources to ensure that these needs are met. It means placing the needs of the people before personal profiteering.  A humanistic approach is also where people are made aware of the dangers of the corona virus and how it is transmitted and how one can avoid being infected through mass education campaigns.   This awareness makes people voluntarily take action to stay at home, to observe distancing and hygiene.  There is no need for government intervention because people as a rule do not want to be ill

or to die so going forward they will take care, remain safe and safe guard those around them.

The other approach is an authoritarian approach using the army and the police force to enforce compliance. Poverty, lack of education and complacency could result in noncompliance and even defiance. Rodrigo Polanco of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in writing about Latin American Theology as a Humanist Proposal describes the "conceptualization of the poor as a non-person." They are not seen and their existence is denied or not known.

These people face real constraints such as lack of water and reticulation systems making it difficult for frequent hand washing - and other hygiene measures needed. Millions of people have no bathrooms and no drainage systems. They use large dishes or small tubs to bath in and these are shared. The used water needs to be discarded. The little spaces between the homes are where they are able to discard the water. The stagnant water in their neighbourhood leads to proliferation of mosquitoes and new health risks are faced by them.

Their meagre income is derived from activities such as car washing, street trade, hawking, and domestic work. Shut down prevents them from earning this income. They have no surplus. They have no security of unemployment insurance schemes. These practical realities make compliance difficult for them.
The terror of the military and police drives the already frustrated and anxious people to anger and results in rioting, looting and destruction of property. Government can supply water tanks or send out water tankers but that does not meet the long term needs of the community. Post covid 19 they all will be where they were. No change takes place in their conditions and no change in the thinking of the many who can make a difference in the lives of these people.

Covid 19 has thrown a torchlight on these hitherto invisible communities. According to the present thinking including what South African President Ramaphosa said, life cannot be the same post lock down. The question is how will it change? We can go the route of a conservative approach deepening the rift between the rich and the poor or we can go the humanist way changing our thinking to make the invisible visible and begin to address their needs creatively, involving them in the process.

The government has recruited thousands of young people to do door to door work, screening the community. If they are provided with further training so that they can gather vital information on the living conditions of the people they visit, such as their education level, housing needs and at the same time providing them with information on general health care. This information can help governments plan for each little area systematically. The young people in the future can become community health care workers providing a vital primary health care service, if properly trained now.
We are creating temporary shelters for the homeless, but we need to think in terms of long term residences for them. In these facilities we can employ people to educate the homeless on the corona virus while also gathering information on those who are addicted to alcohol and drugs and the educational levels of the people and the constraints experienced by them because of unemployment. Based on this information, plans can be made for long term accommodation for these people. Rehabilitation centres and hostels can be built to meet their needs.

In short, if we can begin to look at how some of the things we are doing at present begin to become longer term arrangements to improve the lives of the people in the future we will be spending funds with a purpose.

We have been able to mobilize so many people into contributing to both providing financial and community service to cater for the needs of the poor. Can we keep that spirit of giving for the future when we can provide better more lasting and effective assistance to our communities to ensure a more stable society. These steps would become the catalyst for a change in our thinking - from wealth accumulation towards solidarity. Our President and His Holiness Pope Francis have spoken about solidarity economics. Let us

look at developing solidarity indexes and make a total paradigm shift towards humanism.
Humanist thinking will focus on the needs of the deprived.  It will take a holistic long term approach rather than a short term band aid approach.   An egalitarian order based on the ideals of the freedom charter can begin to be realised if we lay the foundations for this new way of thinking now.  If we can encourage our religious, business, cultural, sports and social sectors to develop this world view of giving instead of taking and of building instead of breaking, we can achieve a strong solidarity economy.

# 11. Between COVID-19, National Lock-downs, God and Gandhi

Dr. Bobby Luthra Sinha works as Senior Vice-President, Research at the Osianama Learning Experience (OLE), Delhi; Executive Committee Member (Hon.), International Commission of Migration at the International Union for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences(IUAES); Deputy Director (Hon.), Centre for Asian, African and Latin American Studies (CALAAS) at the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), Delhi. She is an independent social scientist and a writer who is passionate about inter-disciplinary researches, including documentary making, on issues pertaining to Anthropology, Political Science, Environmental studies, Migration and Art.
Contact: bobbyluthra@gmail.com; bsinha@osianama.com

Bobby Luthra Sinha

The COVID-19 outbreak followed by the related reports, News and a steady stream of data flowing from and around it has begun to dominate our existence from the end of 2019 pilfering into and becoming prime over all other concerns of the year 2020.  From what it appears, the pandemic that has gripped our present is going to leave neither our past nor the future alone. While some analyse the pinnacles of individualism and consumerism which have come to dominate the global discourses and lifestyles in the recent past with a sobering hindsight; others are busy telling us how we will need to work on redefining our future modes of thinking and being. But all agree that the present raises questions, concerns, worries and brings on dead ends that seem either difficult to resolve or completely invincible. In one way or the other, the newest Corona Virus disease has shown us how fragile our world is and how easily all, including the fortresses in which we have invested our energies and wealth,can be torn asunder, permeated, overwhelmed and undone.

A changing, searching world
There is no contesting the fact that the world as we knew it, has suddenly changed in the past few months and will not stop short at that. It promises to keep on changing further. The world seems to be in search of News and views that are significant of a breakthrough, of illuminating a clear path. But will there be a feasible solution? If yes, who and what will help us?

Where will the strength to recover and heal come from?
Whether real, actual, virtual or fake, the information and news pouring in on the pandemic has given us both an endless gloom and an insuppressible hope all over the world. But the question remains, how are we to live hereafter?

Can there ever be any universal model during and post COVID-19 times? I firmly believe in the negative. All peoples and cultures of the world must dig deep to solve the challenges and arrive at their own ideals of humanity to put up a brave face against all that COVID-19 pandemic signifies.

The question of recovery and healing has never been solely physical and all the more so now. Mankind requires a solace from endless exploitation of natural resources and a limitless association with the extreme materialistic, hedonistic, reckless, prodigal and ego-centric thrust of the past thirty to forty years. These imprudent postmodern existences have certainly received critical theoretical and practical counters and warnings from many a think tank and local community. Obviously these contestations  have not been enough to convince the mainstream World against imposing over others and investing in purely universalist notions of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, language, and social progress.

Perpetual living on the edge, amplified by deafening and  numbing, blind global trajectories of social,

political, economic, administrative and psychological rat races  have depleted many of our strengths, individually and socially. We, from every house and living place  that we occupy or the forest, river, mountain and desert that we live in must own up and reclaim peace and harmony.

 We need to recover and search for spiritual and physical energies in the scary but ameliorative pause that the COVID-19 triggered drama of lockdown has brought to our doorsteps. We can do so by going back a bit and at the same time, taking a step forward.

Networking humanity and Immunity to fight the dangers of the newest Corona Virus Disease
However, is this re-looking at the world, as I speak of in the preceding lines,  going to be a mere top down process given to us by the powers that be, especially those that pretend(ed) to control the Globe?

Once again, I firmly believe in the negative just as the many experts and commoners who now propose that it is we, the people, who will play a lead role, as we always have, in placating humanity out of its fears and misgivings. We, the people must re-establish models of hope, safety, sanity, prosperity, peace well-being and judicious use of natural resources.

While governments ponder at the national and international implications of the pandemic and lockdowns, people are doing   their bit too. They are building networks of charity, goodness and immunity by giving help, food and care where needed. Respecting lockdowns and understanding how to deal with them using creative energies, talents and capabilities people are surging ahead by organizing donations and assistance, education, social dialogues, entertainment and community work both online and offline. In the real and the virtual world, we witness a tooth and nail battle against the pandemic caused by latest Corona Virus strain known as COVID-19.

 The Globe seems to be insidiously pushing us into forming a human chain of positive energies.  People are coming together to create an intricate local as well as a global immunity for self and one another as well as remembering the virtues of a distributive justice, whereby the travails of the poor, hungry, sick, unemployed, displaced and oppressed, marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups   can be alleviated . In a hard hitting, practical and compassion evoking way, the COVID-19 crisis is reminding us of eternal values proposed by philosophies such as India's Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam  or  South Africa's Ubuntu, both inspired by ancient Asian and African knowledge systems respectively.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is made up of three Sanskrit words - Vasudha, Eva and Kutumbakam. Vasudha means the Earth, Eva means emphasizing and Kutumbakam means a family. As a social philosophy emanating from a spiritual understanding of the World, the term, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' implies that humanity is made of one life energy and whole Earth is just one family, as diverse and different that it may be from one another.  Ubuntu denotes and refers to the essence of being human, i.e, 'I am because you are'. It speaks particularly about our interconnectedness.  The fact that you cannot exist as a human being in isolation or be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality - Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity.

National Lockdowns, God, Godliness, and Gandhi
In COVID-19 times, has God closed shop? Well, the diehards would never answer this with an affirmative! No, they would say, the houses of worship, God's own temples, mosques, shrines, synagogues, cathedrals, churches et.al have merely closed doors to maintain and aid social distancing. God continues to reside in our hearts and live within us, if we only care to listen deep, search our souls and let godliness flourish in our spirits and temperaments. Here I imply an ethereal and ephemeral godliness which leads us to be free from many bondages of our own making, as Gandhi would have wished and hoped for had he been walking the terrains of 2020 with us.

Way back in time he carried on a tireless campaign for promoting and implementing the values of proper

cleanliness, sanitation, hygiene, disposal of waste and dignity of labour. By equating cleanliness with Godliness and in giving the world a philosophy of peace, harmony, truth, non-violence and humanity, it is obvious that Gandhi spoke of a composite spiritual as well as internal godliness and cleanliness, over and above the physical.

What's the takeaway from National Lockdowns and Social Distancing?
Resurrecting our ability to identify with and practice as well as empathise with the ethos of a profound humanism is a difficult ideal which the dreaded Corona Virus disease seems to have suddenly brought focus upon. In fact it seems the most natural ideal and many of us cannot fathom why should it have got left behind at all?

It is visible how many cultures the World over seem to be finding their equilibrium and searching their solace in critical humanism and humanitarianism. Such a takeaway wisdom from our dark and encumbered existences under lockdown is nothing short of a silver lining. My firm belief is that we can still overcome the travails and encumbrances of national lockdowns and address the gaps between God, Godliness, COVID-19 and Gandhi to bring on environmental wellness, topical cleanliness, compassionate interconnectedness and a global well being.

Note
This article has also been published online by Asian Newsmakers on April 30, 2020 and can be accessed via the following link:
https://www.asiannewsmakers.com/between-covid-19-national-lockdowns-god-and-gandhi-by-dr-bobby-luthra-sinha/?fbclid=IwAR3zE0xSST1FR5pZEQFVk76uZvjdPE0CsXnHB7mDxhUZDMlDlwgXdqau9v0

## *On the Role of the Social Sciences*

# 12. Psychosocial Needs of Women in Informal Settlements: Creating a Humanities Agenda during and post COVID 19

Prof. Nirmala Gopal is currently the acting Dean and head of the School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Among her foci of research is 'hidden' and vulnerable communities as victims of crime, social injustices and discrimination with the aim of promoting justice and fairness for unequal groups in society. She has completed research on school based violence in disadvantaged communities and cybercrime, her recent work being published in Acta Criminologica in 2018. Prof. Gopal an NRF rated researcher has multiple publications in peer reviewed national and international journals.

Nirmala Gopal

COVID 19 an unexpected virus with unprecedented consequences has rocked and shocked the global community. South Africa's COVID 19 National Command Council provides detailed daily reports reduced to its lowest common denominator such as the sex, province and tangible geographic locations of those who succumb to the virus. This detailed mode of reporting although unprecedented is germane and proper South Africa's democracy.

It is no doubt a favourable time for South Africans to demonstrate a sense of community. We need each other as the virus will not discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or geographic location.

Understandably global and national public discourse and frequent updates on the Coronavirus is rooted almost exclusively on a medical model of intervention and reporting. Yet undesirably this model is at the peril of discounting psychosocial impacts of the virus on poor and other vulnerable communities. Central are citizens namely women in vulnerable communities whose psycho-social needs must be addressed during and post COVID 19. Among these vulnerable groups are women living in vulnerable communities and, for the purpose of this opinion piece, in informal settlements. Women in these settlements like all other citizens are mandated by law to inter –alia exercise social distancing in their limited physical space. This in addition to additional roles they play such as managing how their children practice social distancing in confined spaces where communal living is their mode of survival. This, further to other competing priorities, they are responsible for and must accomplish for their and their families survival.

Yet the rest of the world believe citizen's lives during the pandemic is equal. Mothers believe the woes of parenting is universal, inadvertently undermining socio-economic circumstances of those living in informal settlements. Men and women believe sympathising with the cause of vulnerable and women in informal settlements during COVID 19 implies they understand their plight. Citizens around the world transmit messages of the vulnerable via social media platforms and are elated at some form of acknowledgement they receive for forwarding some vulnerable woman's challenge. Those with unlimited data and wifi access express pity and believe they are have contributed to the daily struggles of vulnerable women by forwarding these messages (albeit inappropriate at times).

This is foolhardy. Unless we have walked the journey of the disadvantaged and poor we cannot pretend to understand. Unless we have lived or physically been in informal settlements or similar geographic spaces then it is improbable that we authentically understand. We cannot pretend that women living in informal settlements have the same priorities and facilities as their bourgeoisie counterparts in such domains as

children's education when their most immediate focus is on accessing clean (optional) running water and dignified sanitation. COVID 19 has refocused us "We can no longer disregard the inequalities that South Africa is fraught with." So our responses to COVID 19 should now be predicated on and inclusive of non-bourgeoisie and medical discourses.

Will the virus coerce academics to reflect on ways to aggregate data sets collected from vulnerable communities (for Phd's and publications) to plausible community interventions? Will we reflect on aggregating data (previously generated for discipline specific purposes) to emerge with co-ordinated interventions that transcend beyond academic purposes such as attaining qualifications and producing publications. Is it possible that we can show mettle by testing our individual level of care and commitment to those who have enabled us to live our privileged lifestyles? Are we capable of suspending our own needs during these challenging times by investing our energies in bringing together humanities researchers in a co-ordinated manner to give back to women (and others) in informal and vulnerable geographic spaces? Are we able to transcend our interventions from talk shops to intervention "shops"? Are researchers and academics in Humanities able to chart a combined interventionist agenda on how to provide psychosocial support to women in informal settlements?

Humanities has the scientific power to fulfil the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goal's (SDG). However these goals will be bereft of meaning unless we fulfil SDG 5 "Achieve (ing) gender equality and empowering all women and girls."

The intention of this piece is to provoke debate on how a larger community of academics and researchers in Humanities may meaningfully contribute to ameliorating some of the psychosocial impact on women living in informal and other unequal geographic spaces by translating their findings to solutions and informing policy changes.



Picture: SABC News

# 13. The challenge of renewed global citizenship and the role of science

Dr. Michela Freddano is a Researcher at the Italian National Institute for the Evaluation of Educational System of Instruction and Training (INVALSI) where she is responsible of the Research Area of School Evaluation. With a PhD in Evaluation of educational processes and systems, she is a recognised Expert on Programming, analysing and projecting social and educational policies (at University of Genova). She is member of the Board of the Italian Association of Evaluation and Secretary of Research Committee 10 of the International Sociological Association (ISA) "Participation, Organizational Democracy and Self-Management".
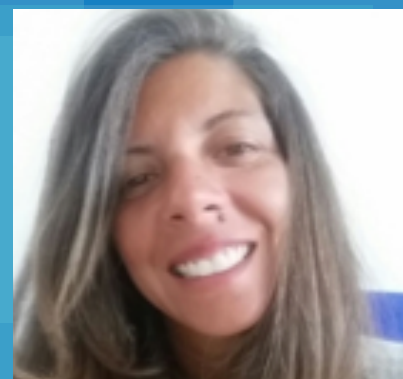
Michela Freddano

On January 24, 2020, while I was having breakfast in a hotel in Naples, TV reported on the Covid-19 outbreak in Huwan and the containment measures being put in place to avoid its spread. At the 12th National Congress of the Italian Sociological Association at the Federico II University, which involved Italian sociologists and several foreign colleagues, the last session was on "The regime of knowledge in a global world. The case of social sciences" (January 25, 2020). It involved the participation of the President of the International Sociological Association, Sara Hanafi, was attended by many people and it was the last gathering in which I physically participated.

On February 20, 2020, the first Italian case of Covid-19 emerged. Many North-Italy regions progressively locked down, because the health situation was getting worse, and from March 9, 2020, the lockdown covered all of Italy, a situation that still prevails today (3 May 2020). All the physical appointments had been suspended. The annual Congress of the Italian Association of Evaluation, scheduled for April 2020, had also been suspended and the assembly had been done, for the first time, online on April 27, 2020. In the meantime, I received ESTA to go to the United States, to participate in two international conferences scheduled for March and April: the first one became a virtual meeting, the second one was cancelled, like it was during the World War II. The ISA IV Forum of Sociology, scheduled for July 2020 in Porto Alegre, has also been postponed until February 2021, following a heartfelt reflection of the international community of sociologists.

During this time, we were ready to undertake a survey of school teachers aimed at eliciting their expectations and attitudes towards teacher training on school evaluation. However, we understood that we were facing an epochal change that would have generated a cohort effect that would have affected data collection, so the survey did not start.

According to Geoffrey Pleyers:
"our lives have been profoundly shaken by the CoVID-19 pandemic. Social scientists have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a sanitary crisis. It is also a social and political crisis, and should be treated as a moment of rupture that will bring a major change in our lives, our societies and our world",
We are facing a break with the past, experiencing a great change, on a global scale, characterized by uncertainty.

The Covid-19 pandemic is not only a phenomenon of nature but it is also social and historical. Compared to other pandemics that affected the history of human beings, the rapid diffusion of Covid-19 is also a globalization effect. The fig. 1 shows the commercial air traffic across the world before and during the pandemic, comparing the same period of the 2019 year (red line) and the 2020 year (blue line).

Fig. 1 Number of commercial flights: comparison between 2019 and 2020 (January 1 – April 25)
Source: our elaboration of Radarbox.com data.

This fall effect refers to a situation of strong economic criticality and explains that the interactions at macro level change, as well as at micro level agency and routines change and digital socialization increases along with social inequalities. We assisted also at what in sociology are called collective behaviours consisted of a glocal set of individuals subjected to the same stimulus, who react and interact in situations without certain reference to defined roles.

Actually we have a transitional role living, according to Parsons (1951), in a phase of adaptation to cohabit with this corona virus. In that frame of relative freedom, what is the role of participation into decision-making? According to Prêtre (1998), the time you have to make a decision also determines how to decide (fig. 2). A particularly urgent situation polarizes decisions, while when there is no more urgency, decisions can be more democratic.
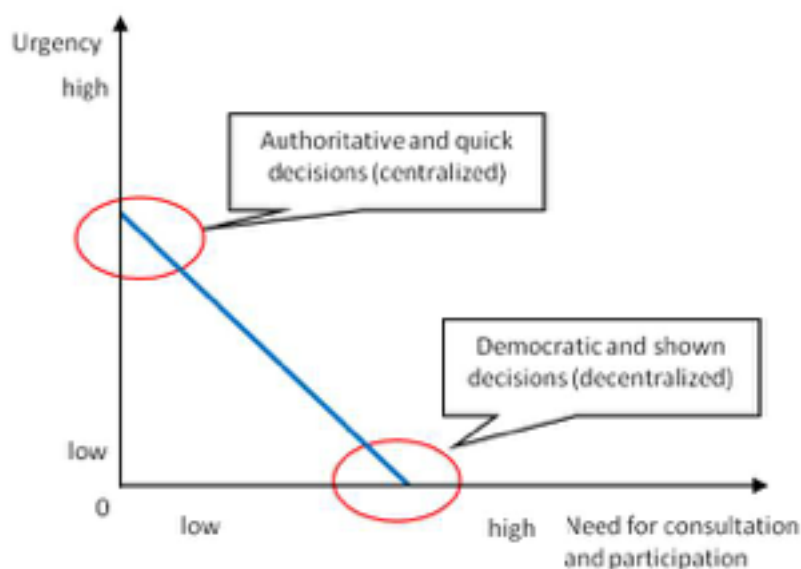


Figure 2 Who decides? When? How? Source: Prêtre (1998: 11).

This perspective is in line with the fact that, in situations of strong changes, verificationism is not applicable and therefore the accepted patterns of the rational models are discarded. The more unstable the environment, the more incremental rationality is needed to achieve results.

Incremental rationality is the normal case of environmental uncertainty, where actors have no clear or coincidental ideas, so it is possible to define broad objectives. Progressive adjustments are needed and it is possible to find later means and opportunities that were not seen before or were not available, to change objectives in *itinere*, looking for agreements and satisfactory solutions.

During the pandemic, scientific knowledge became increasingly important and individuals have shown that they want to inform themselves. One of the lessons learnt consists of the fact that science does not produce absolute truths, rather it shows that old paradigms don't hold up. In fact, scientific knowledge is related to the observer's point of view,it is historically influenced by factors within the scientific community and by external factors. This pandemic is an example of how knowledge produces the awareness of not knowing and how probabilistic laws cannot predict with absolute certainty the occurrence of an event. The experimental method itself is no longer entirely reliable, in the sense that it does not necessarily provide irrefutable answers about the validity or not of a theory. At the same time, we have also learned how emergency is synonymous with innovation.

In that view, Covid-19 can be a possible challenge for a renewed global citizenship, in which all individuals are responsible to the community and the surrounding environment. In this framework, scientific dissemination has the role of a *liason*, between what Lepenies (1985) called the three cultures, and social sciences can really be the bridge between the humanistic and scientific cultures.

References
Bagnasco A., Barbagli M., Cavalli A. (1997), Corso di Sociologia, Il Mulino: Bologna.
Lepenies W. (1985), Die drei Kulturen Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft, Munchen, Hansen Verlag.
Prêtre S. (1998), "Decision-Making in abnormal radiological situations", in OECD. Nuclear Energy Agency, The Societal Aspects of Decision Making in Complex Radiological Situations. OECD Proceedings, OECD, Paris, pp. 9-19.

# 14. Covid – 19, Capitalism and Science

Dr. Jayanathan Govender is a senior lecturer in Industrial, Organizational and Labour Studies, School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa. He has a PhD and degrees from the Universities of Durban Westville, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. His interests include civil society, interdisciplinary studies, BRICS sociology, sociological practice and futures research. He is published in the areas of public management, participation, higher education, social policy, inequality, and social justice. govenderj1@ukzn.ac.za

Jayanathan Govender

Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic presents the human community with a radical uncertainty; another categorical mystery among numerous others; and the frightening threat of another global endemic. COVID-19 has been best described recently by Amartya Sen as a global social calamity. Not being tempted to refer to COVID-19 as a disease, as would some health workers and scientists, Sen presents the human community with a causal relationship between a social calamity and an end to social relations in the current epoch. Needless to say, the work by Sen and his colleagues were highly effective in preventing famine in parts of India and Africa. In a similar vein, Sen once again competently lifts the veil of economic history and attendant association with well-being.

COVID-19 and capitalism

Some argue that the Black Death, a bubonic plague pandemic that spread from Mongolia to Western Europe in the 1340s, brought great human deaths that not only reduced the workforce, but concomitantly produced the crisis of feudalism in the late middle ages. Manorialism, the new arrangements forming the rural economy reorganized the class relationship between the aristocratic landlords and agricultural producers. It took a bacterium to produce a social calamity that, in turn, forged the early heritages of classical capitalism by striking at the inadvertent core of human society, i.e. the drastic reduction of the proportion of workers, thereby reorganizing the social means of production. The question now is whether today's capitalism will face a set of challenges like that of feudalism. Things appear so.

Concerned inputs to the World Economic Forum claim that today's capitalism face triple crises: (1) the pandemic has produced a global economic crisis, and piled up with the climate crisis, "business as usual" is no longer possible; (2) the pandemic is exposing structural flaws in the global economy as more workers take on multiple and precarious jobs given the rise of the gig economy; and (3) the self-employed and entrepreneurs are left shocked by the sudden withdrawal of their participation in the formal economy.
In the plainest language, for the capitalist system to prevail, all economic life in that system is based on people going to work and spending their wages. However what we have is a capitalist system that is in a state of global recession; labour relations and fora where workers demanded all sorts of rights and determinations has vanished; and small businesses stuck in debt burdens and extended financial crunches. More so, where the macro-economy has raised large loans, even at 0% interest rate from multi-lateral institutions will experience punishing economic regression, further compounding their current commitments.

The deliberate shutdown of global economic activity, despite the obvious dangers of a deep and pervasive crisis, is unprecedented (even in wartimes) and appears as a negation of neoliberalism capitalism. This

phase of capitalism is driven mainly by consumerism, and a jolt to unbridled consumerism is bound to result in states being held ransom by the multilateral institutions and the markets, which for now are the main sources to raise capital. State reserves for disasters, emergencies and conflict mitigation will be so depleted so that a country like South Africa, which is already a victim of a developmental crisis, will be vulnerable to multiple risks and social disasters. A future of growth, sustainable development and prosperity is hardy achievable under conditions of social calamity. The attended economic tragedy and the country's last resort will be to substitute natural and value-added assets for cash to settle national debt.

COVID-19 and science

Since the last three months the COVID-19 virus continues to defy the rules of science in general, and laboratory and clinical management in particular. Scientific process has also come under civic and political attack. Young people all over the world flout the very precautions intended for their own health safety, and the political process knows of no other instrument but hegemonic war. The "war" mode is dominated by a single leader vested with constitutional authority to direct that war, aided by senior experts who may dispense opinions based on past wars, existential conditions and contrived models projecting logical probabilities. Clearly, such a war is inappropriate for a social calamity, let alone that that very war attacks its own people! This is very clear where the poor, unemployed, migrants and displaced are afforded minimal if not no protection by the state.

The COVID-19 pandemic, while very real, appears counter-intuitive at times, and disturbingly elusive at other times. Just when scientists think that they have figured some aspect about it, new knowledge in the form of new dangers or uncertainties emerges. The scramble of scientific activity is not always well intentioned. The private sector have much to gain, and given their independence, may be inclined to take short cuts as well as succeed at rent-seeking.

The future of the state appears politically meaningless in the absence of good scientific direction. The state is placed at great risk: (1) state failure – given South Africa's recent politics, there is a view that the state has failed since post-state capture; (2) there will be no working economy to speak of soon, if among others, the closure of SAA and the retrenchments of some 6000 mine workers proceeds; (3) the poor, marginalized, unemployed and migrants will be unable to bear abject hunger and starvation, and naturally will burst out violently into the public space; (4) work as we knew it will be so minimal that livelihoods will vanish; and (5) the delicate social compact that we achieved under the current Presidency will turn to suspicion and mistrust. If these risks were to materialize, the collective outcome of COVID-19, i.e. the world-wide outcome will be unimaginable. At this point, material reality will appear as the stuff of fiction and the movies.

Afterword

If in a mere 4 months, we stopped capitalism, bought and consumed far less, retrieved and burnt less fossil fuels, almost stopped the disposal of plastics and associated garbage in our rivers and oceans, and as a consequence of social isolation, other species got to explore new spaces, then surely we would have noticed that the hole in ozone layer has repaired, the world's children got to learn new ways of learning, and we humans are gradually learning about coexisting with our nonhuman relatives and appreciating more the sameness of our human destiny.

The potential post-COVID-19 world then could be (1) about us humans appreciating the fragility and finiteness of existence, despite our advanced development, luxury living and this thing called power; (2) some version of a socialist welfare state is appealingly possible as we approach the 4th Industrial Revolution; (3) that work can be humane and meaningful; (4) individualism and its attendant values of greed and suspicion will decline in favour of the common good; (5) science will inform our attitudes, behaviours and social choices; and (6) those gaps in the social conditions of poverty and inequality will be shut permanently.

Notes

1. COVID-19 is an acronym, standing for coronavirus disease of 2019. COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by the SARS-CoV2 virus. Viruses and the diseases they cause have different names. For example, AIDS is the disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV. COVID-19 is thought to have a zoonotic origin. Genetic analysis shows that the coronavirus genetically clusters with the genus Betacoronavirus, in subgenus Sarbecovirus together with two bat-derived strains.

2. Yersinia pestis is a non-motile, rod-shaped, coccobacillus bacterium. It is a facultative anaerobic organism, i.e. it can transform itself under changing conditions. It hitches a ride on the oriental rat flea known as Xenopsylla cheopis, which in turn hitches a ride on rodents.

## *On Policy*

# 15. Child and teen care: problematizing Italian policies at the time of Covid19

Donatella Poliandri is a Senior Researcher at INVALSI (Italian National Institute for the Educational Evaluation for Instruction and Training) and a member of the AIS (Italian Association of Sociology) Scientific Committee - Education Section. As Head of the Innovation and Development Research Department of INVALSI my research interests are related to supporting schools in self-assessment processes, promoting evaluation skills of school staff, developing the evaluation culture in the places where learning takes place and promoting a decentralizing perspective in supporting schools.

Donatella Poliandri

The global pandemic of COVID 19, in addition to putting the world in crisis as we have experienced up to now, affecting every aspect of social life, can offer new dimensions in thinking about how governance takes place and what responses were given in a moment of emergency.

As a scholar and a citizen, I think one of the hottest issues in this emergency concerns the policies that the Italian government has put in place for child and teen care and my approach to these policies try to take nothing for granted. I think it is necessary to shift attention from solving the problem to how the problem arises - by questioning the ways in which the proposed change represents problems - because looking at what is proposed, as a policy intervention, will reveal how the issue is being thought about.

As Carol Bacchi says in her Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be? (2009), understanding how government takes places, and what implications for those so governed, allows creating a public space for debate: "The term 'policy' is generally associated with a program, a course of action. Public policy is the term used to describe government programs. There is an underlying assumption that policy is a good thing that it fixes things up. Policy makers are the ones who do the fixing. The notion of fixing carries with it an understanding that something needs to be fixed that there is a problem. This presumed problems can be, but does not need to be, explicitly elaborated. That is, most government policies do not officially declare that there is a problem that the policy will address and remedy. Hence, there are implied problems. It makes the case that it is important to make the problems implicit in public policies explicit and to scrutinise them closely" (Bacchi, 2009:IX-X), asking questions about policies economic sources and how they operate.

The approach to policy analysis introduced by Bacchi challenges the commonplace view that policy is the government's best attempt to deal with problems. In this conventional understanding of public policy that are exogenous the policy process. Hence, the focus of analysis is limited to competing ways of 'solving' policy problems. The terms in which specific policy problems are understood are left unexamined. But if you look at a specific policy, you can see that it understands the problem to be of a particular sort. Policies therefore give a shape to problems. Hence, rather than reacting to problems, governments are active in the production of policy problems.

So, if we look at the child and teen Italian policies at the time of Covid 19 we can see that they takes shape within specific historical and national dimensions, reflecting deep-seated cultural assumptions: this implied problem (Dean, 1999) is to be intended as the question of the space of rules.

Following the lockdown across Italy and the consequent closure of schools of all levels, which took place on 4 March 2020, the policies implemented by the Italian government that can affect - directly and indirectly

- child and teen care are mainly four, and implying different problem representations.

Abruptly and ex officio two and a half million workers were placed in Smart working by their public or private employers: a great open-air social experiment. We do not yet have empirical data capable of demonstrating how and what this approach little used in Italy before now has managed to achieve the aim of changing the organizational systems of work in this moment of emergency.. However, we can assume that the flexibility introduced by smart working was the only immediate way to solve the problem of the impossibility of sending children

to school. Now, at the time of Covid19, smart working does not represent a balance between work and private life or a welfare corporate initiative, but it seems more similar to working from home using technologies. Not as smart as it seems! Child and teen care is here represented as a labour market problem and it is judged a 'problem' when both parents - including the primary care giver (most often the woman) - are engaged in paid employment.

Subsequently, the Italian government introduced the babysitting vouchers and extended the possibility for one of the two parents to take advantage of parental leave from work. Usually the vouchers are given to the families leaving them the possibility to choose how to spend them: babysitter for family care or institutional care. We can consider parental leave from work as a grant - a kind of voucher - for a parent who stays at home to continue the role of primary care provider (normally a woman) for a usually low amount. In this policy option, caring for children and adolescents is a "problem" of family choice. Parents can choose how to manage their responsibilities. These solutions are clearly oriented for families who have two incomes but leave out those who have only one income or no income at all.

In the meantime, seven million students of all levels have learned – plus or minus-to manage so-called distance learning, which represents the only form of school in Italy today and certainly for the next few months. This is another policy option by means of which to take care of children and teens. Distance learning has helped to uncover a series of critical issues already present in the Italian education and training system. I will mention only a few. The first is the multidimensionality of the digital divide, which underlines that it is not enough to equip schools with an adequate IT infrastructure or train teachers to use new technologies to ensure effective and efficient teaching for all. In addition, distance-learning policy ignores embodied and social relationships, and sets up divisive practices, which tend to exclude specific social groups. This raises questions about its desirability. The second critical issue is that families - and the wide society - consider schooling not so much as an educational institution, but as an organization for the care of their children, in particular in the segment from kindergarten to lower secondary school. Again, child and teen care seems to be a labour market problem (and the problem of schools exclusively a problem of the lack of technological infrastructure).

Policies are often complex, combining a series of proposals. Thus, there may be more than one representation of the problem within them. These different types of representations in each policy can conflict and even contradict each other. How do we identify the dominant representation? An easy way is to see how the funds are earmarked for one policy rather than another; this can certainly help identify the dominant representation of the problem.

The Italian government has allocated € 1.2 billion for the policy of baby-sitting vouchers and for the extension of parental leave from work. The Italian government has defined the same action program through the two identified measures, allocating an overall sum without dividing the funds.
For distance-learning - and more generally for the Italian schools - the Government has allocated € 80 million divided as follows: € 70 million managed by schools to equip all students who need it with the necessary technological tools (tablet , personal computer, internet connection); € 10 million to equip schools with the necessary IT infrastructure and hire 1000 IT assistants; € 5 million for teacher training.

Nothing has been allocated to support Smart working policies.

These strategic options show that the dominant representation of the problem of child and adolescent care during the Covid 19 emergency is a matter of family choice (especially in relation to the primary care giver in the family - more often a woman). However, as regards the cultural dimension of the context in which the policies in Italy determine the problem, I am not sure that this vision is linked only to the exceptional moment. The care of children and adolescents in Italy has never been a matter of public responsibility.

According to Bacchi, it could be appropriated thinking of the Italian child and teen policy in anthropological terms, as a cultural product.

This brief reflection during pandemic is a warning to me: the more policies have an undeniable cultural dimension, the more necessary is cross culture and cross-national comparison. This type of analysis might encourage us to think about links between areas, highlighting important crosscutting themes. At the time of Covid19, problematizing the problem seems to me to be the only way of public responsibility, placing the emphasis on making citizens responsible for ever wider aspects of their lives, in order to choose their own future.

# 16. The future of international cooperation in times of existentialist crises

Jaimal Anand has worked for South Africa's Department of International Relations and Co-Operation (DIRCO) since 2005. He is attached to the Office of the Deputy Director General Asia and the Middle East and is responsible for Research and Analysis. His areas of professional focus are on the Geostrategic and Geopolitical developments in the 21st Century. Anand has held a variety of regional portfolios during his diplomatic career, has participated in many international conferences and has written extensively on key strategic and policy issues.

Jaimal Anand

As the Covid-19 virus continues to spread globally, the news media and social media are flooded with the horrors the deadly pandemic has caused. We've seen mass graves in Europe, while China contained over 50 million people in a single province, India has put 1.3 billion people and South Africa 58 million under lockdown. With all the technology and predictive gadgets at our disposal, something as pre-historic as a virus, with symptoms resembling the common cold or seasonal influenza, has ravaged the world and forced humanity to its knees.

There was early praise for the exceptional Chinese system of governance at the outset of the lockdown. As a result, there were suggestions that only authoritarian states would survive the pandemic. Interestingly, what we have learned is that liberal, constitutional democracies like India and South Africa can effectively muster their populations to voluntarily surrender certain freedoms and liberties, without compromising their rights. The leadership of governments has been phenomenal in most cases; South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and his cabinet prioritising human life over everything else was a bold and courageous move that may well prove successful.

World leaders and leading scientists are grappling with the realities that we confront. It is a dangerous time in the journey of Covid-19 where we may be tempted to question the severity of the virus or assume that the worst is over. The truth is that we still do not know the greatest threat that Covid-19 will present. It preys on the natural human instinct of social proximity, and this invariably turns strength into humankind's greatest weakness.

Diplomacy, front and centre
In the diplomatic arena, consular officers and experts in migration are auditing and exchanging notes on the impact of Covid-19 on their work. The nexus between public health and national (and international) security has never come so frighteningly close, at least in the last century. While all of this was going on, countries started to repatriate their citizens. These realities have since become the most glaring example of the centrality of a professional, crisis-ready consular corps for any foreign service in the 21st century. The consular officer is required to function in a global environment where people travel more frequently, in higher numbers, and with more risk across the globe.

In South Africa, the repatriation is being managed at the highest levels, where an inter-ministerial 'Command Council' chaired by the president was convened to take charge of the decision-making process on the plight of South Africans abroad, among other things. This tells us that this area of diplomacy will be given more considerable attention and prominence in South Africa and many parts of the world.

Consular and political officers are increasingly expected to forge broader and more relevant networks to manage crises, but they are also expected to maximise opportunities. Traditional diplomacy is increasingly embracing non-traditional, non-state actors as part of its broader network of engagement. Large multinational corporations, enterprises involved in niche areas, civil society actors in different parts of the world, international fund managers, banks, and mega foundations have significant amounts of global influence and reach. This may well be the ideal infrastructure that is incorporated into long term consular operations.

However, the darker side cannot be ignored. Threats to the state are also incubated among other kinds of non-traditional actors. These are often sinister, opaque and include, but are not limited to, transnational crime, violent extremism and organisations representing radical anarchic ideologies.

These realities propel the consular official to the centre of multilateral and multinational operations ranging from refugees, stranded citizens, conflict areas and victims of transnational crime. It is at this level that the solidarity that we expect in international relations and interstate communication becomes part of our existence. The foreign ministry becomes the space where cooperation and solidarity are needed to protect the state and advance its interests. This is the only, non-comparative way to organise the chaos of disruption in the global terrain.

Human solidarity
History is crucial to navigate safely into the future. But the current situation is without precedent, and so we do not have the privilege of hindsight. We have experienced mass pandemics through the centuries, but Covid-19 has emerged in a global scenario that is already challenged by new realities, fractured institutions, complex disruptions and unpredictability. The ongoing human solidarity initiatives that are being led by our governments, civil society and citizens in general, is critical to protect the most vulnerable in our communities from the virus, hunger, grinding poverty, and in the end contain, its potential to damage.

The Covid-19 pandemic reminds us that we are incredibly vulnerable as a species. The relatively sudden disruption of travel, communication and individual lifestyles have brought to the fore the challenges that humanity has grappled with since the end of the Second World War. The need for reform in the global governance architecture has never been so clear, while the global balance of forces has become more dynamic and increasingly unstable and unpredictable. For the last decade, our multilateral and global governance institutions have been under considerable strain. The US's decision to withdraw funding to the WHO has demonstrated the vulnerability of our international institutions.

South Africa's response to the Covid-19 pandemic — declaring a disaster, enforcing a strict lockdown, stopping all domestic and international travel, halting all non-essential commercial activity, and mass testing and screening — is in line with WHO guidelines. The WHO has done well to coordinate and guide South Africa and other countries on the science-backed do's and don'ts to deal with the crisis. This capacity must be strengthened and protected for now and in the future.

On 16 April, members of the Alliance for Multilateralism, convened in September 2019, signed a statement that called for "enhanced international cooperation and worldwide solidarity" while stressing that Covid-19 was a wakeup call for multilateralism. The Alliance highlighted five challenges that the pandemic poses for the international community: health, information (including misinformation and fake news), financial, economic, and prevention. The increasing shift in favour of 'network diplomacy' within the UN system may prove to be a necessary method to reignite cooperation, solidarity and multilateralism to ensure its relevance in the 21st century.

Cooperation is crucial
It is at times like this that our need for multilateral and international cooperation becomes critical to our

survival. Some might argue that the advance of the Covid-19 virus might negatively impact globalisation. But recent acts demonstrate the inherent will among most states to cooperate and collaborate.

Solidarity and cooperation, when confronting an existentialist threat is crucial to the survival of humankind. How foreign ministries organise their departments will be central to shaping the international agenda. The Covid-19 pandemic is teaching us that the narrow corridor between self-interest and altruism lies in our will to work together. We can define that work either in terms of solidarity or cooperation, or our narrow self-interest. Either way, our very survival and existence may well depend on our approach to reform and protect the global architecture.

*First published in the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) online, Expert Speak series.*

# 17. Coronavirus will have Long-Term Implications for our Democratic Politics

Dr. Paul Kariuki serves as the Executive Director of the Democracy Development Programme (DDP), based in Durban. Academically, he holds a PhD in Public Administration from the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). He is also an honorary research fellow at the school of Management, IT and Governance, UKZN. His research interests include public governance, public participation, citizenship, electronic governance, monitoring and evaluation in the public sector.

**Paul Kariuki**

President Cyril Ramaphosa on the 15th March 2020 declared COVID-19 aka Coronavirus, a national disaster, following the rapid spread of the disease and the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) that it constitutes a global pandemic. Since then, the government has been hard at work providing intervention measures aimed at curbing the spread of the pandemic. Whilst these efforts are laudable, the nation is beginning to feel the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. This is against the downgrades by the rating agencies, Moody and Fitch. In its efforts to flatten the curve, the government has extended the lockdown period with a further 14 days.

Political participation in the various mitigation processes by the various political parties has been limited as the parties give the government space to roll-out its interventions and manage the spread as responsibly as possible. Understandably, managing a health crisis of this magnitude in a democracy requires cooperation from all political stakeholders. On one hand, the government is balancing the democratic rights of citizens by ensuring that they are not infringed upon by its intervention measures whilst protecting them from needless exposure to the pandemic. On the other hand, it is obligated constitutionally, to inform the public and political parties of its intervention plans on a regular basis, to limit unnecessary political attacks on its mitigation strategies. Thus far, government decisions have been respected by all political stakeholders, which is commendable.

However, to ensure this political equilibrium is sustained for as long as possible, there are emerging lessons for noting as far as our democratic politics are concerned. Firstly, all political stakeholders have broadly embraced the intervention plans of government and have supported them so far. For instance, we have seen political parties' officials from both the ruling and opposition parties taking COVID-19 tests and declaring their results openly to the public. This is a good sign of cooperation and needs to be lauded as it serves to strengthen inter-party-political relations especially at this time.

Secondly, politics does influence, for better or worse, the success or failure of public health interventions. It begins by interrogating how health challenges are considered in the policy agenda. Perceptions regarding the severity of the public health challenge, the affected citizenry as well as the responsibility for the challenge, necessitates cooperation across the political spectrum. The interventions are dependent on political action (or inaction) because the social determinants of health are amenable to political interventions.

Thirdly, building on the political cooperation observed thus far, political leaders are likely going to adopt incremental policy changes rather than comprehensive reforms given the scale of the impact of COVID-19 on our health system. Fiscal constraints facing the government will greatly influence the conditions under

which larger-scale transformation of health policy can occur. However, there are opportunities to be seized for innovation and therefore political parties, as well as policymakers, need to take advantage of them.

Fourth, since protecting public health involves moral judgements that acquire legitimacy through political debate and resolution, the continued constructive interaction amongst all political stakeholders (civil society, business, citizens and political parties) is critical. For instance, the challenge of access to health services by all citizens irrespective of their social class, status, gender, race or nationality is critical. Whilst statistics and other products of professional research are useful tools to inform political decisions on such aspects as facilitating access to health and other basic services equitably, politicians need to acquaint themselves with these tools, to make evidence-based decisions rather than decisions based on commonplace information and societal interaction.

Fifth, all political parties have a moral obligation to support public awareness efforts including their own political constituencies. Whilst some opposition parties have done some public awareness on COVID-19 to their constituencies, the efforts need to be increased and sustained throughout the year and beyond. Ongoing public health communication and sensitization is critical in managing a crisis such as COVID-19 and ordinary citizens do appreciate it when they hear useful messaging from political parties of their choice. In this vein, such communication needs to be stepped up, in supporting and complementing government efforts towards educating the public about the pandemic.

Going forward, COVID-19 has changed our democratic politics significantly. Political responses to this challenge and any other public health care challenges that may occur in future, will necessitate responsible political cooperation from all political stakeholders. So then, government responsiveness must always be a multi-stakeholder centred, bounded by a system of checks and balances guided by our constitution to protect the rights of citizens. All these aspects will be supported by a strong sense of responsibility by government respecting the various institutional systems already in place that necessitate political accountability at each sphere of governance.

Moreover, public opinion in all these processes is critical for social and political stability. Elected political representatives rarely use public opinion as a guide for setting priorities and formulating proposals, rather they use ready-made talk to generate public endorsement of policy proposals in which they have already invested their resources. Citizens involvement in all policy processes is critical for a stable democracy, especially in examining the political feasibility of policy proposals as well as financial affordability. It is important to note that their voices matter.

Ultimately, despite the shape and form that our democratic politics will continue to take post COVID-19, a new era of solidarity and social concern has come. Collectively, we need to work together irrespective of our political ideologies towards strengthening our public health care system, stabilizing our economy as well as establishing a targeted social security support program aimed at protecting the vulnerable in our society.

## *On Food*

# 18. Food through the lens of Covid 19

Dr. Sheetal Bhoola is a lecturer at The University of KwaZulu-Natal in The School of Social Sciences and a postdoctoral fellow with the Andrew Mellon Foundation funded Critical Food Studies Program. She completed her PhD in Anthropology at The Univeristy of KwaZulu-Natal. Her masters Degree in Sociology was conferred by 3 International Institutions namely, The University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Albert- Ludwigs Univeristy in Freiburg, Germany and Jawarlal Nehru Univeristy in New Delhi, India. Her publications and research interests are on migration, the Indian diaspora, sociocultural structures, tourism and the Anthropology of food.

Sheetal Bhoola

The 30th of April 2020 signified the official end of the first phase of the South African Lockdown. The second phase of lockdown began based on reports of escalating infections of Covid 19 in South Africa. This still means limited movement in home cities, closed businesses and industries, temporary unemployment for the majority and minimal social interactional experiences. This was strongly complemented with practicing social distancing and good hygiene practices amongst other personal sacrifices to flatten the curve of the Coronavirus 2020 pandemic.

Despite the fact that all South African leaders have been preaching that we are all at similar risk to contracting the virus, the socioeconomic impact of the lockdown on different classes has varied in a country which is already plagued by wide economic gaps. Class hierarchies in our society determine whether people have access to basic resources such as water and food.

Politicians, religious leaders, social influencers and those alike continually inform us through numerous mass media measures that class, ethnicity, historically disadvantaged societies, the uneducated and unskilled, and the unemployed are all fighting this battle together. This perception is supported by an analysis and documentation which focuses on the manner in which the virus can be contracted and the similarity of all the symptoms that we each can experience after contracting it. Similarly, present infected patients too have indicated similarities in the conditions such as difficulty in breathing and influenza like symptoms brought on by the disease.

However, in the the 8th week of the lockdown phase-out (moving from level 5 to level 4) measures, the majority of South Africans who endure hardships was inadvertently exposed. I make special reference to the employees within the informal economy and small enterprises that are dependent on daily sales to survive. Many South Africans are solely dependent on an income from the informal economy and the functionality of this economy is based on "no work, no pay" and "no work –no income" norms.

Street food traders only see an income if they are out there on the streets retailing their food items to citizens in the city centre of Durban. Likewise, 'contract' employees in this sector are not entitled to any unemployment funds and have received no financial aid from their employers or organisations, despite not being able to earn an income during the lockdown. Government has undertaken initiatives in this regard by availing a number of national grants including a covid grant, but the criteria and conditions hinder accessibility for many of those who are eligible. The accessibility of these grants marginalises the illiterate person starving in rural areas and segments of our populous that have limited or no access to the necessary technology. Some needy South Africans may not even access the grant as their priority will be attaining a daily meal to survive under these conditions. These grants are not enough to buy food for a

month for a person, but are there to fill a gap in struggling households. The weakened exchange rate of our currency had added pressure to the costs of basic commodities such as wheat and rice, which form part of the staple diet of many underprivileged households in South Africa. These homes have been challenged with daily and weekly food budgets and the daunting task of continuously preparing cost effective meals for their families which can be influenced by the availability or inaccessibility of basic foods such as rice, maize and wheat based products such as bread at reasonable prices. Homes have to compromise on the luxury of balanced nutrition and other personal necessities so that food can be sufficient for all.

Food safety has become an escalating concern as continual research indicates that the virus can be found on the packaging of store bought food items. Food related health concerns for the poor and rich during this time can take many forms which include the consumption of an inappropriate diet for those with pre-existing illnesses due to lack of funds and to concerns which indicate that food packaging can be a source of transmission.

For middle class homes, cooking, baking and meal preparation has become a sort of occupational therapy and a pleasurable task whilst one is at home. These families have been thriving on the experiences of attaching social meaning to their creative culinary preparations which is coupled with the development of new eating habits combined with traditional meals and eating patterns.

With the availability of time and access to an abundance of ingredients, some families have engaged in cuisine preparation outside of their daily diets inherent to their cultures. Ingredients of meals that were usually bought prepared and ready to use are instead made from scratch during this time. The distinctive culinary tastes of people of become an exploratory journey and a unique dining experience for some. Grocery stores in Middle class areas have a lack of baking ingredients such as flours, dry yeast and products alike amidst the lockdown. Many South African families have now engaged in cooking dishes from Italian, French, Mauritian, Thai cuisines amongst others…an opportunity to travel to another country through the means of exploring the cuisine of another nation state. The interrogation of which dishes are ethnically authentic and which are locally infused dominate the minds of some. The sharing of recipes and detailed visual guides via social media websites and telephonic messaging, the exploration of other types of foods and the constant togetherness has encouraged meal preparation and cooking a gender inclusive, fun and recreational activity for the entire family…the emergence of a bilateral household activity for some pre-existing patriarchal homes.

The economic and symbolic value creation of food is now scrutinised through a lens blurred by the pandemic. The lack and availability of food for some has been brought to the fore, whilst others explore cuisines and traditional meals which allows for reflection on other cultures. The relationship we share with food, the way food will be perceived by some will differ to previous perceptions which can result in permanent and temporary food way changes. Some will be more appreciative of their daily bread, whilst others have invested this time in adopting culinary skills which contribute to their cultural and social capital. Food too has been responsible for broad societal changes globally and such a pandemic has encouraged existing trends of feeding the impoverished. At the fore we see within our society non-Profit Organisations, Large corporations and businesses, religious organisations such as Temple, Mosque and Church philanthropy organisations all unite and contribute effectively and continually attempt to address food insecurity.

What is clear is that relationships to food is largely determined by class positions and this has been exacerbated and brought to the fore by the Pandemic.

[1] These government aided grants are accessible through online platforms which require the use of technological devices and the capacity to read one of 11 South African official languages. In addition, as a prerequisite to apply one must have a valid bank account and a South African Identity number (Mahlati, The Star, 30 April 2020).

[2] According to the Lebanese American University, the virus can be transmitted through food only if an infected person has dispersed the virus through sneezing or coughing onto the packaging of food products available for sale in supermarkets. It has been reported that the virus can live on the products for a number of hours (Lebanese American University, Coronavirus 2019, www.lau.edu.lb.)

*On the Social Determinants of Health*

# 19. The Social Determinants of Health in the era of Trump

Dr. Katrinell Davis is an Associate Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at Florida State University, where she teaches courses exploring race and gender relations, poverty and policy, as well as work and mobility trends within the American labor market. Dr. Davis is a stratification sociologist who specializes in race and class inequalities in urban areas, especially as they manifest within the workplace, schools, and within communities. Her recent work explores the limits to community organizing for improved essential services in low resource communities.

Katrinell Davis

A group of lockdown protesters standing shoulder-to-shoulder and openly carrying automatic rifles stormed the State of Michigan's Capitol Building on April 30, demanding access to the House Floor. Just under two months under a "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order, residents have been claiming that they don't want the state's protection. They want access to their businesses, jobs, restaurants, parks, and gyms. They want their way of life returned to them, even though a rushed return to the norm might have devastating consequences.

President Donald Trump has encouraged these protests supported by white nationalist far-right groups from his Twitter pulpit and during press conferences throughout the pandemic. Due to his obsession with reopening the economy, Trump has been inciting threats from lockdown agitators against state leaders like Governor Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan and elsewhere in the United States. Trump hasn't been on good terms with state governors who have opted to rely on science and expertise as opposed to speculation and wishful thinking to guide their COVID-19-related decisions.

Instead of making efforts to calm his base and encourage the development of federal testing and treatment standards, Trump's administration has scrambled from one day to another, peddling false hope and empty promises. For weeks, President Trump has been hosting awkward but insanely entertaining daily COVID-19 taskforce briefings. During these one to two-hour events that have included several slide presentations and campaign ads, Trump has attempted to appease the American public with a spectacle of insults, bully tactics, and misinformation. While this pandemic grips the nation, from my perspective, President Trump also seems overwhelmingly focused on people he thinks wronged him. He also seems focused on his constant spats with news networks and political rivals like presumptive Democratic nominee, former Vice President Biden, who he condescendingly calls "Sleepy Joe."

Despite President Trump's attempts to distract the masses, COVID-19 continues to demonstrate that it must be taken seriously due to its impact on the American public, especially institutionalized populations and racial minority groups who have been disproportionately impacted by this pandemic. Based on available numbers reported broadly, African Americans are two times more likely than Asian Americans to die from COVID-19. They are also three times as likely as Latinx Americans and almost four times more likely than White Americans to experience a COVID-19 death. In states like Michigan, where African Americans make up 14 percent of the population, African Americans make up 50 percent of the death toll. In New York, Latinx Americans outnumber other groups who died from COVID-19.

When we first heard about COVID-19, I recall being prompted to be concerned for the elderly as well as folks with respiratory issues and compromised immune systems. We weren't thinking about how people

with other underlined conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma would be affected. We weren't thinking about the social determinants of health and how some populations are more vulnerable than others to experience adverse health outcomes due to their status in the social hierarchy. We weren't thinking about the need for targeted support for America's discarded cities under 500,000 like Flint, Michigan, and Dayton, Ohio, that have longstanding revenue and socio-ecological challenges. But now data shows that the hotspots for COVID-19 are in racial minority communities. Trends indicate that this population is more likely to get sicker and die more frequently from this disease.

This disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on people of color is problematic for various reasons. First, almost half of the uninsured population in the US are members of racial/ethnic groups, and a substantial percentage of this population lives in poverty. It is also the case that racial minority groups are more likely to work the lower level hospital jobs that don't provide affordable health coverage or the option to stay home when sick. Relatedly, they are more likely to be renters who have increasingly been subject to eviction for nonpayment during this period.

Efforts have been made to assist all Americans contending with COVID. For instance, the CARES Act passed by the US Congress included direct aid for American citizens, state, and local governments in addition to financial support for businesses so they wouldn't need to fire their workforce. But, compared to the financial support available to white-owned businesses primarily, limited direct aid has been provided to individuals as well as states and local municipalities. Due to the lack of federal help with securing necessary supplies and services throughout the pandemic, some cities might need to lay off first responders or go bankrupt, a move that would hurt vulnerable groups like retirees who depend on state-funded pensions. On May 4, the US Congress will return to Washington DC, some vowing to allow their staff to work virtually to protect their health and safety. When they return, US Congresspersons will be discussing some of the Trump administration's administrative nominations as opposed to engaging COVID-19 related hearings. They plan to move forward judges while avoiding the opportunity to exercise oversight over the Trump Administration's COVID-19 response—all while endangering the lives of hundreds of Americans who work in the US Capitol.

In the end, the US continues to host a polarized electorate engaged in a longstanding cultural war. At the same time, this situation has brought us closer in many ways because the widespread impact of COVID-19 has been undeniable. Stores, schools, and businesses are all closed. Nonessential goods in some states are off-limits. Parents are homeschooling while teleworking. Lives have been lost. This disease has turned our world upside down.

Although most Americans would like to go back to work, the vast majority don't wish to return until it is safe and opportunities for testing have expanded to everyone who needs it. Most are comfortable with a gradual reopening of the country. However, despite what appears to be the will of the people, President Trump, who has in recent days dialed back the press briefings, will likely continue to demonstrate more concern for his political standing than the struggles of Americans contending with this unprecedented health crisis.

(Photo: Fernanda Pesce Biazquez, AFP) - South Africa food queues

(Photo: Zak Bennet for Daily mail.com) - Florida food queues