



CRISES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE THROUGH AND BEYOND CORONA

UNDISCIPLINED PERSPECTIVES

FROM THE GOVERNANCE & SUSTAINABILITY LAB

PRODUCTION

Governance & Sustainability Lab, University of Trier

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MAIL TO: GOVERNANCE & SUSTAINABILITY LAB
SUBJECT: CORONA AS THE (ONLY) CRISIS IN THE
ANTHROPOCENE?
DATE: 23 MARCH 2020

Dear all,

I am looking forward to our coffee break and video chat tomorrow! Corona really is a disruptor and one way of dealing with it productively is to learn from it. Yet, following the news, I am more and more concerned about the single focus on Corona, as if all the other crises disappear (or aren't connected).

The Global South will be hit very hard and for instance: what about the locusts in East Africa and the looming hunger crisis for 25 million people, climate change and water security? But also: what about the improving air quality, reduction in CO2 emissions or the newly discovered importance of (underpaid) care work? How does this relate to sustainability?

The pandemic shows how connected everything is - the social with the natural, the local to the seemingly distant places, the ill-being of the planet and the ill-being of humans... Therefore, I was wondering if we as a lab could write a short piece that we distribute on twitter. I guess we have something to say, as it relates to our research and teaching on Sustainability and the way we problematize the Anthropocene.

You could think about it and let me know.

In the meanwhile, take care and make the best out of this situation. I hope you and your families are doing well.

Warm regards

Antje



FOREWORD

After more than one week of staying in home offices and practicing 'social distancing' due to the outbreak of the Corona virus, we, the members of the Governance & Sustainability Lab at Trier University, received the email you just read by our professor Antje Bruns. Without further communication, emails with short pieces dropped in one after another, organically and – much as the virus – exponentially evolving into a collection of undisciplined reflections on life in crises.

The diverse writings show that every one of us of the Governance & Sustainability Lab is affected by the Corona crisis – but in different ways. Some are just forced into their comfortable home offices, some need to navigate between home office and care work for their little ones. Some have been abroad to conduct fieldwork, while being concerned about the data gathering process or being unable to return (wrong country of origin, wrong passport). Some of us have not been able to go for fieldwork, that would have taken place in Veneto, Italy.

Our knowledge generation processes will be affected by this situation. We believe that knowledge is always situated – knowledge production is embedded in wider historical, social, political, economic and ecological processes and Corona will remain a reference point for these times. But will it guide our thinking and doing in productive ways? What will we learn out of the crisis? Will we be able to change pathways that make us vulnerable and harm our resilience?

In the following, we share some thoughts – subjective, unsolidified, and personal. We thereby offer insights to our mental and conceptual worlds, to our thinking and the digital discussions because we are physically separated.

You can expect nothing more than an assemblage – between our contributions is no inner coherence in a strict academic manner and yet you will see confluencing arguments. We see the world from below (and from the very localities) and we see it from above and zoom out. We try to focus on connections and ambivalences. We aim to politicize societal relations to nature and the extreme inequalities in the Anthropocene.



VirtualLab
#SharingVirusStories
#Socializing
#PhysicalDistancing
#Geographers@Work
#SystemChange

ANTJE BRUNS

The very nature of the pandemic is about human-environment relations

The Corona pandemic disrupts everyday life in 189 countries of the world. It is a historic crisis, which travels around the world. It travels with people – and some studies say that it also travels with aerosols (small particles in the air). But it also travels with the capital flows whose continuity is now blocked, as David Harvey pointed out recently¹. In the public discourse the pandemic is compared with the financial crisis in 2008 (relating it thereby to a worldwide economic recession), some speak of war (an interesting act of speech that serves to legitimize extraordinary means, including border closure) and others envisage and in fact look forward to the collapse of the capitalist world as we know it. Obviously, the framing and understanding of the current Corona crisis varies and some think of it in narrow ways, observing infection rates and doubling time, while others relate their crisis analysis to injustices and inequalities of our economic and social system².

COVID-19 prompts us to pause as it disrupts our everyday life – the private one and our professional as lecturers and researchers. So what do we do with this unwelcomed pause? We suggest reflecting on the crises (in plural!). We reflect on them from different angles and perspectives, to embrace the ambivalences and see the connections: The virus itself is invisible, but the resulting emptiness of public spaces creates a weird presence around the globe. The virus connects places – no matter how remote they are – and jumps scales. It spread from some few places to the global level. It loves foremost dense, urban places and global centers, but some caught it in their skiing resort and brought it home; it does not respect national borders that are now nevertheless closed. Some say the virus leads to new solidarities on the micro level; yet it also reveals a shocking lack of solidarity between states in Europe and beyond. It shows how ill-prepared we are in our modern societies in which progress is measured as GDP. Now we learn that we are vulnerable too, our connected economies are fragile and we learn that in the end human well-being is the most important good.

¹ <http://davidharvey.org/2020/03/anti-capitalist-politics-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

² <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/how-to-beat-coronavirus-capitalism-tickets-100840167656>

Human well-being and biophysical systems are closely related. Earth System Scientists have warned for a while that we overstep planetary boundaries, but our current economic system rests on and reproduces other boundaries. These boundaries separate our world in the included and the excluded, the 'us' and the 'them', the West and the rest. Those who consume resources and emit CO₂ and those who are landless and carry the burdens. Socio-ecological burdens and inequalities are the defining characteristic of the Anthropocene and the crisis is multiple, overlapping and reinforcing. Our consumption and production styles in the Global North are affecting ecosystems and livelihoods all around the world. To give an example from our research: The overfishing in the Gulf of Guinea is mainly driven by European and Japanese trawlers, and this leads to an increased consumption of bush meat in Ghana. Why? Because local fishing communities with small vessels and an even smaller outboard engine have very low catches and so they turn to other livelihood and protein sources. The consumption of bush meat is most likely responsible for Ebola and, as it seems also for Covid-19 that then travelled with the human hosts. We need to acknowledge that our imperial mode of living³ has far-reaching consequences.

To flatten the curve of the pandemic, economies were shut down. While the virus remains invisible, something else appears in satellite images from ESA: air quality improves in industrial regions that stopped or slowed-down production, transportation and traffic. This is a good (unintended but welcomed) outcome of this disruption, because emissions of aerosols are affecting lungs, making them even more vulnerable to diseases and leading to thousands of deaths due to air pollution. It also buys us some time (a few weeks perhaps) in mitigating climate change. These positive impacts on the environment and the promising solidarity between people can act as a positive utopia in this dystopic moment. Perhaps this is THE momentum for the much-needed transformation towards a low-carbon economy.

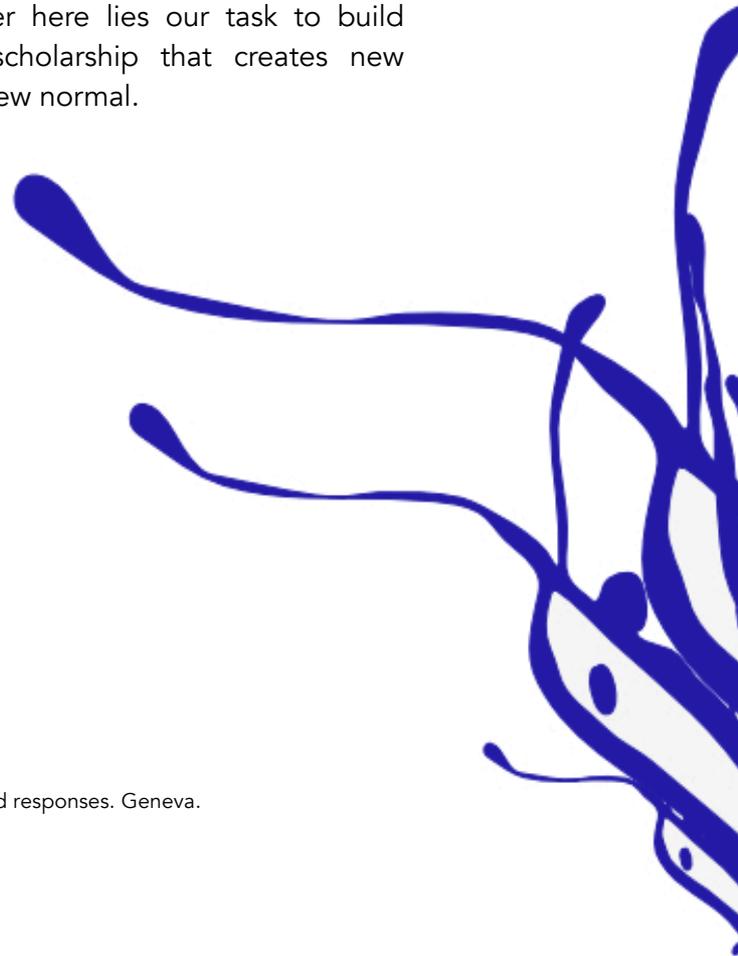
The social and the natural are inseparably intertwined, this is perhaps the central insight of the crisis looming for a while now: The World Health Organization has warned since 2001 on its website that land use

³ Brand, U., & Wissen, M. (2013). Crisis and continuity of capitalist society-nature relationships: The imperial mode of living and the limits to environmental governance. *Review of International Political Economy*, 20(4), 687-711.

change and urbanization, habitat degradation and biodiversity loss, climate change and demographic changes are posing cumulative risks to human-environment relations. "Worldwide, there is an apparent increase in many infectious diseases, including some newly-circulating ones (HIV/AIDS, hantavirus, hepatitis C, SARS, etc.). This reflects the combined impacts of rapid demographic, environmental, social, technological and other changes in our ways-of-living. Climate change will also affect infectious disease occurrence"⁴. Having this in mind, we should zoom out a little – not to distract from the suffering of those who are infected and ill, but to see the struggles and contractions in this era called the Anthropocene.

In the Anthropocene, we speak about a bottom billion that fail to progress; in the Anthropocene, 25 Million people are at risk of hunger in East Africa (yes, it is not in the news anymore but that does not mean that it gone away: a locust plague is threatening livelihoods). In the Anthropocene, 485,000 people die from diarrhea per year. Other real threats in the Anthropocene involve the negative consequences of climate change, air pollution and resource grabs in the name of economic growth (our economies – not theirs). Critical scholarship must not overlook these connections; rather here lies our task to build alliances for a new transformative scholarship that creates new imaginations of a sustainable and just new normal.

⁴ WHO (2003) Climate change and human health - risks and responses. Geneva.



VIVIANA WIEGLEB
The Politics of COVID-19

Covid-19 travels the world and leaves no stone unturned. At least in Europe, life as we know it has come to a halt, while governments are implementing measures beyond our wildest dystopian fantasies. With 'Outbreak' and 'Pandemic' among the most watched movies on Netflix, life increasingly feels like a Hollywood drama. Long held certainties, day-to-day routines, personal freedom and civil rights are gone in an instant. While self-isolating at home and with some time to ponder, several thoughts come to mind.

First, despite all technological progress and attempts to dominate nature, this virus brutally confronts us with the vulnerability of our human bodies. Hence, some might call this pandemic a 'natural disaster'. Watching the daily news, however, I cannot help but wonder about the social nature and politics of Covid-19. Above all, this virus reminds us of the most pressing social and political concerns of our time. As if seen through a magnifying glass, Corona exposes the urgency and interconnectedness of issues like climate change, international migration, human rights, social justice and gender equality, which span the world from the global to the household level. Global disparities that might be ignored, side-lined or glossed over during 'normal' times reveal themselves in every aspect of this pandemic. While European citizens around the world are evacuated and flown to safe(r) homes with better healthcare, we have to ask ourselves this uncomfortable question: Who is left behind? Indeed, these days the word 'solidarity' is on everyone's lips. We stay at home in solidarity with the most vulnerable, despite severe societal disruptions. However, I am unsure whether this will be remembered as a time of unity or as a time of division and reclusion. Right before our eyes European cohesion crumbles and borders are closing. While Germany is still anticipating the pandemic's peak, we stand back and observe the collapse of Italy's health system. This lack of solidarity not only appears in global or European disparities. Such inequalities also play out across generations and in our homes. With teenagers and students celebrating their unexpected 'Corona-holiday' outside, the sick and elderly might have a high price to pay. Moreover, with people and families confined to their apartments, child abuse and domestic violence cases are on the rise. Home is not a safe place for everyone, not to mention the exposure of people without a home or a secure place to self-isolate. Corona might

be a 'natural disaster'. However, it affects us differently, as our capacities to adapt vary.

These aspects in particular reveal the pandemic's similarities with the climate crisis. In fact, both are directly related. Years and year of climate negotiations were unable to achieve what the virus has managed within a couple of weeks. As a direct consequence of people working from home, planes staying on the ground and industry shutting down, CO2 emissions and air pollution levels have declined. As someone engaged in environmental protection, I also observe with some sense of frustration that the amounts of money unavailable for addressing climate change are mobilized in an instant to stabilize collapsing economies. Corona confirms what we have suspected all along: Where there's a (political) will, there's a way.

As the virus rages havoc in many parts of the globe it seems clear that our post-Corona world might be very different. While crises can open windows of opportunity for policy, institutional and social change we need to ask ourselves: Opportunity for whom? Who will fill the spaces created by this crisis? Confined to my apartment I try to stay positive and convince myself that this disruption could initiate the long-anticipated transformation of our economy and human-nature relations. Let us not succumb to the current trajectory of business as usual, closed off borders, nationalism and right-wing tendencies. Let us not put economic growth first, while treating the environment as a luxury concern postponed to some distant future. Instead, let us find comprehensive solutions for our interrelated challenges open up alternative pathways and actively shape the world we want to live in once this pandemic is over.

REBEKKA KANESU

Reflections on a Crazy Critter

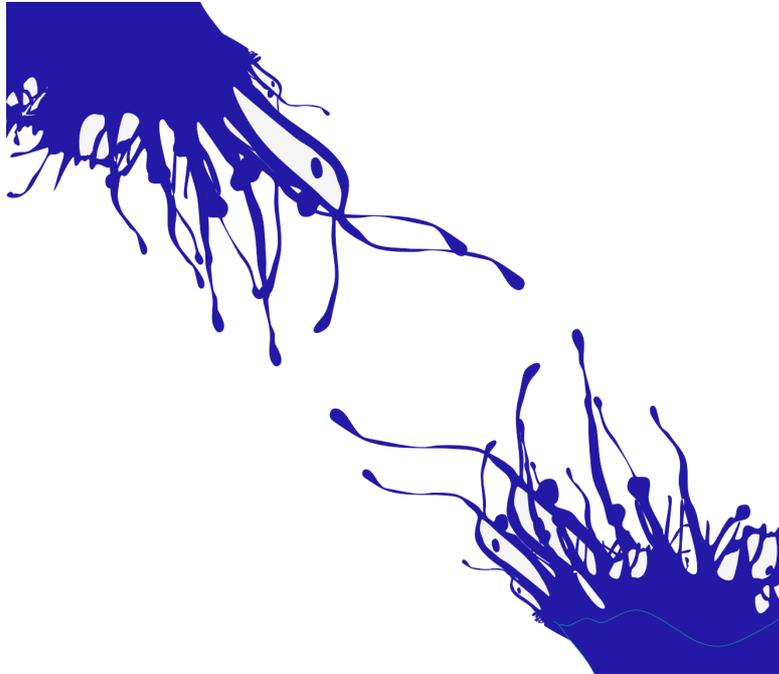
The coronavirus (aka COVID-19), our new freaky co-habitant is still a mystery to many of us. However, we do know that it loves to travel through air, hang out on the soft skin of our hands and reproduce, especially in the most vulnerable bodies. Corona doesn't know borders, doesn't care about skin color, gender, race, age, education or sexual preference. Corona loves us equally.

But, we are not equal. While some people (academic folks like us) suddenly realize their privileged positions of being able to do thought-work from the comfort of their cozy homes, others like nurses, doctors, cashiers, mail man and women, factory workers, farmers, truck drivers and many more, still need to go out and must take the risk of getting sick. While some governments can afford to mobilize huge amounts of money to save and support national businesses and invest in health infrastructure, other countries with weaker economies and less stable political and institutional structures may suffer severe health risks, if their virus coping strategies fail.

Though Corona loves us equally, it painfully points to the many inequalities that prevail in our families, regions, societies and on a global scale. Suddenly we recognize the hidden structures of global capitalist supply chains, but also the delicate web of social and emotional ties that bind our societies together. While we witness the socio-economic transformations around us with confusion, our more-than-human environments finally get to breath. Less CO², less smog, less traffic, cleaner water and fresher air are just some of the results of Corona's powerful agency.

So what then, can Corona teach us? It forces us to reflect on what we really need, what we value and how we relate to each other and our environments. What we don't need: fear, hate and endless consumption. What we need: transversal solidarity, respect and (more-than-humane) care. Or with the words of Maria Puig de la Bellacasa: "Nothing holds together in a liveable way without caring relationships" (2011, p. 100).

So, let us care and let us learn how to become-*with* each other during and beyond the Corona crisis.



Doing empirical research in viral times is a difficult task, especially when we are told to distance socially. While interviewing people and participating in social gatherings is not possible now, many researchers get creative and develop new methods to continue their knowledge production. Likewise, I'm trying to stay in touch with the subject of my studies: the Moselle River.

The last time I took an auto-ethnographic stroll along the riverbanks (all while keeping safe distance to other people), I discovered a message, sent out by a small tourist boat: "In the present situation, we would like to thank all helpers and wish everyone the best health. THANK YOU. STAY HEALTHY." As the riverbank is a popular place for recreation and one of the places, people still go out to get some fresh air, walk their dogs or stretch their legs; many strollers read this message sent out by this floating object.

Jane Bennett shows in her writings about materiality and the political



ecology of things, that non-human materialities can become lively actants in our social worlds, too. She asks, "how would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?" (2010, p. viii). What kind of politics would we develop if we took the plastic particles in our rivers, the CO₂ molecules in our air, the virus in our lungs serious? Would it be a politics of more-than-human care and emancipation or a politics of greed, securitization of capitalist markets and nationalist foreclosure? We will find out soon. However, the boat's encouraging words demonstrate that physical distance doesn't

necessarily mean social distance. People deeply feel the need to connect, to communicate, express their feelings, thanks and solidarity to each other – even though we now need technological companions and virtual assistants.

TONI ADSCHIED

From COVID-19 to CO-Vida: Our Dystopian Bodies and their Others

Welcome to the epoch defining spring of 2020, welcome to the age of COVID-19. Dystopia has finally become reality! Or so it seems. Nurses and doctors trying to save lives, people fighting for the last food supplies, deserted streets, empty bars and restaurants. COVID-19 is the name we have given to our newly discovered non-human enemy. An invisible enemy: one who must be anticipated to attack anyone, anywhere at any time, an enemy against whom several countries have declared war.

In this state of war, we are told to “socially distance” ourselves from others in order to reclaim our bodies from this non-human enemy. The war against COVID-19 is one waged within and outside our bodies. “Making live and making die”⁵ seems to be the slogan of the hour: whose body can be saved and whose body is dispensable? The bodies of homeless people, the bodies of families living in overcrowded flats, the bodies of people not holding a European passport, the bodies of people in minimum-wage jobs all present but a fraction of the latter category. Hence, while our bodies are seemingly connected through this “global crisis”, for some bodies the global catastrophe has always been present. Here, let us not forget “the war against climate change”, effecting billions of vulnerable bodies at this very moment. Let us also remind ourselves of wars around the control of land and resources waged by countries against other countries, leading to the displacement of bodies into camps. So here we are: we are confronted with multiple wars and socio-environmental catastrophes, what are we going to do about it?

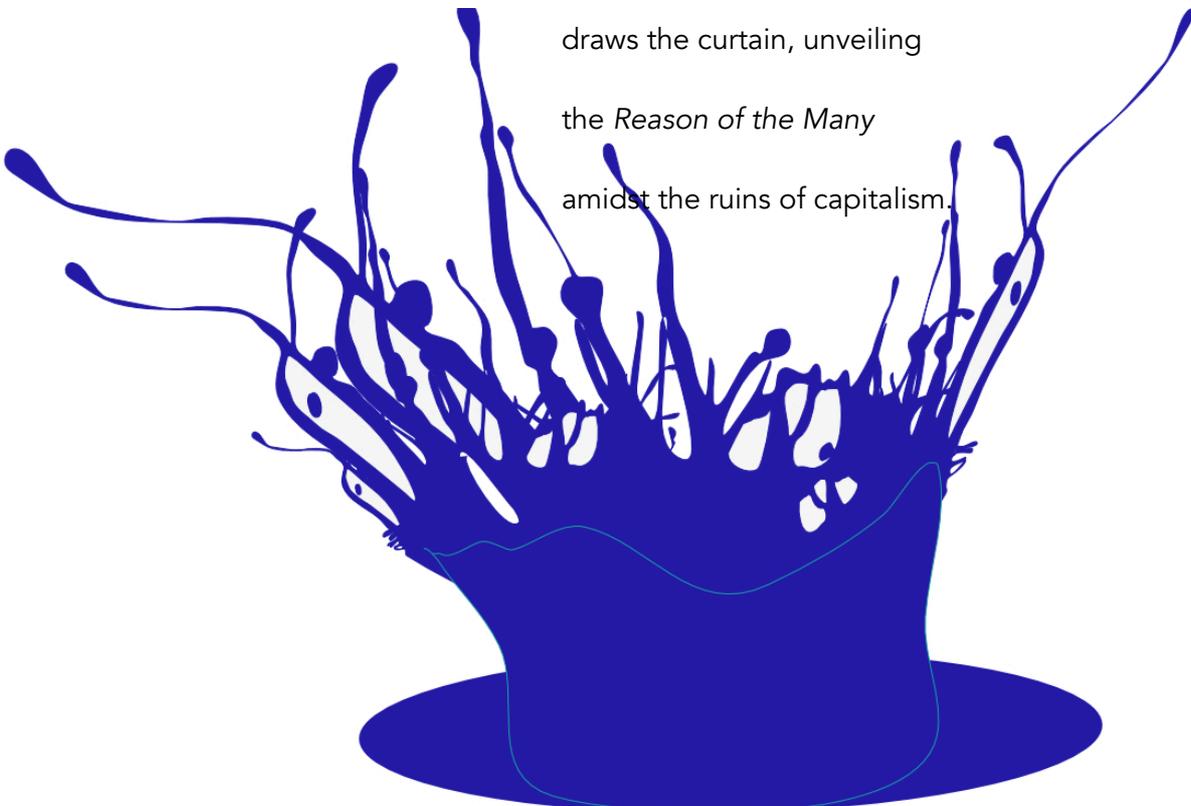
We can use the present moment to withdraw from acting in panic and think. We, who are privileged enough to remain “socially distant”, must think of new ways of connecting our bodies and lives to one another. Admits multiple ways of suffering, we need to think through and rediscover what it means to act in solidarity with others in order to arrive at new modes of socio-environmental organization across pre-established categories for our bodies and for our non-human companions. Why is this necessary right now? It is necessary because it is in the very moment when the war against COVID-19 is settled, that possible futures are widely

⁵ Agamben, G. (1998): *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press: Stanford.

opened up. It is in this moment that we might want to follow the examples set by movements like “Fridays for Future” or “Black Lives Matter” and stand in solidarity with others who demand radical different futures compared to our dystopian present.

JOHANNA HOPP
Upbeat

A critter with a crown
draws the curtain, unveiling
the *Reason of the Many*
amidst the ruins of capitalism.



SARA LARIJANI

Crises, the Feeder and Us

I have experienced the beginning and expansion of the Corona-pandemic in two countries, first in Iran and two weeks later in Germany. In many ways, it appeared to me like a cinematographic Temporal Double. The most striking aspect of this repetitive timeframe was the shift of people's attitude toward the pandemic: From 'it is nothing more than a flu' to 'we are living in *apocalypse now*' in less than a week. Both countries have witnessed how the virus in many ways hindered Chinese society. The news was circulating for a month in Iran about the devastating effects in China. When it hit Germany, it had already crippled Iran and Italy. So, why it was not taken seriously by people at first and how the attitude changed?

There are different angles that one can look at this sudden change of attitude; one angle could be the (willingly late) response of States toward this new parasite in business as usual. The other angle may be the power of the prevailing image of human society as a superior who will conquer whatever on earth. But I am thinking of the power of personal experiences in social relations. When the danger is close enough that you know someone, who is critically infected or now dead because of the virus, it makes a huge difference. Or when the government admits this is the biggest challenge to the country since the 2nd World War and applies measurements you never heard of in your lifetime, these unique experiences will change the attitude toward the pandemic. Facts, images, and stories of COVID-19 existed prior to these experiences but were not enough to deserve full attention. Now, more and more people are taking serious actions to keep themselves and others safe from the contagion, though not all of them. There are campaigns to help the neighborhoods, to support the health workers, etc. All of a sudden, important aspects of our life like leisure, social gatherings and working in an office could be left aside. There are more important things to care about and take serious action upon; try to slow down the Curve and avoid the collapse of the health system for the benefit of the vulnerable part of our society. Of course, there are still some people who do not take the problem seriously or there were some people who act upon the issue from the very beginning. This personal observation is about the majority of people I know or observed in the last weeks.

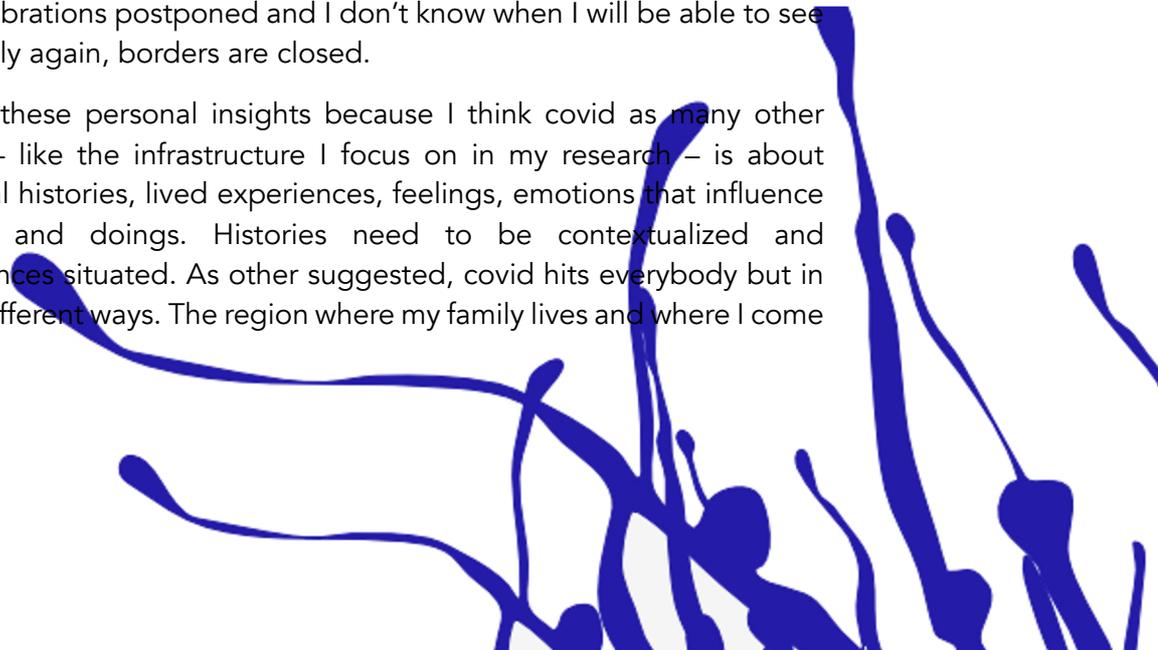
The importance of personal experience to care about something makes me think about the attitude toward the ecological crisis and the inaction towards it for decades. The effects of socio-ecological transformation are destroying lives (human and non-human) especially in the Global South, but they are either too far away from us or/and are underemphasized by those who have political power and the control over media. Facts, reasonings, images, and stories are there, but apparently, it is not enough for us to 'care', 'to act', to dedicate part of our lives for the good of others. Those who feed us information through main-stream media will continue in marginalizing these stories (of more vulnerable people) and underemphasizing the risks to public health and life for the sake of their interests. Thus, many people do not take the dangers seriously as long as they do not see the devastating effects in their proximate space. But, considering the society at large, is it not so late to take action when the climate (and health) crisis is already so 'close' to us?

ROSSELLA ALBA

While I write this, my partner is putting our son to bed. I can hear him singing while our son falls asleep. I use the few quiet moments to drink a glass of wine and to reflect on the current situation. I tell myself, I must be quick, put some quick thoughts on paper and then go ahead with all the house chores that I don't have time to do during the day. Since kindergartens are closed, I and my partner take care of our son 50/50, that means each of us works 4 hrs a day. We are lucky that we can do home-office, that we have a comfortable apartment where to hide and jobs that allows us to self-distance from our colleagues and friends. But permanent home-office means that family and working life mix up more than before. With a toddler this becomes even more visible as home-office means working in between toys, children books, diapers to change and constant breaks to give attention when it is called for. When the toddler in question sleeps, like now, you as a working-from-home-parent must take advantage of the moment to do some chores or/and to finish some work. But as soon as I sit in front of my laptop ready to write, my sister calls. She, her family as my parents (both over-70) live in Italy in one of the regions most hit by covid. In the last two weeks since the introduction of stay-at-home measures in all over Italy I have been talking with my family every day, often even twice a day. It is my way to take care of them, to check how they are but foremost to keep them company, to talk and laugh about daily life with covid (and with a toddler).

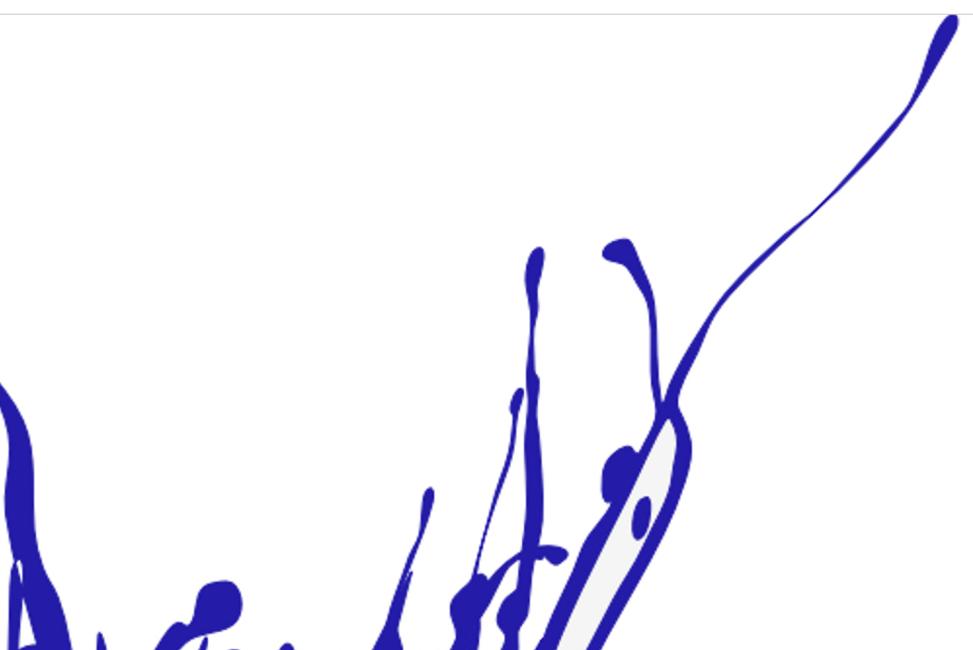
My family is in good health and so are many of my friends who can 'social distance' from others, they are also worried, sad, bored and sharing these feelings 'virtually' seems to help them and me, or so I think. Few weeks ago, when the first covid cases were signaled in Italy, I was to travel to Venice for a two weeks fieldwork, including visit my family and spend some time alone, a celebration of the end of a nursing period and of the return to research life. Now the fieldwork is cancelled, the celebrations postponed and I don't know when I will be able to see my family again, borders are closed.

I share these personal insights because I think covid as many other things – like the infrastructure I focus on in my research – is about personal histories, lived experiences, feelings, emotions that influence actions and doings. Histories need to be contextualized and experiences situated. As other suggested, covid hits everybody but in many different ways. The region where my family lives and where I come



from, for instance, is one of the richest parts of Italy, and probably of the whole Europe, with very good healthcare and basic facilities – people can wash their hands with tap water 24/7 and do not need to carry it home in buckets nor to worry about intermitted supply, a reality of many other areas. It is also the region where a voracious economic growth led to the detriment of the environment and the failure of the promise of capitalism mixed with an historical quest for independence led to the rise of right wing populism – in the last regional election in 2015 the Lega Nord alone had more than 17% of votes.

Sharing stories, lived experiences, emotions and feelings helps in understanding why people do what they do, how they act but also might help to find new synergies, commonalities, shared understandings that in the midst of covid might help to shape progressive changes. - to be continued -



JOHN EDEM AKUBIA

COVID-19 will forever go down as a game changer in the world's history. In view of the increasing havoc this pandemic appears to be causing, scores of both reactive and proactive measures are increasingly being implemented through individual and concerted efforts by governments, private organizations, and non-governmental organizations etc. Countries have largely followed two pathways to try to control the spread of the virus. Some countries have declared a lock-down as a reactive measure to hasten the eradication of the virus spread, whereas some countries have resorted to among other things a proactive "self-quarantine" measure. I have a genuine concern about "self-quarantine" because it feels as though this approach to containing the coronavirus is posing some fundamental questions regarding social and economic inequalities. That is to say, self-quarantine, in relative terms may mean different things to different socio-economic groups. Whilst self-quarantine is practicable and convenient to observe by the rich, the same cannot be said for the poor. It is quite interesting to see how this plays out in Germany and Ghana, which have currently resorted to the self-quarantine pathway rather than a lock-down.

First, let us take into consideration the idea of living space, a fundamental factor to self-quarantine. The rich commonly live in multi-family housing, with each family member in a separate room. The poor on the other hand face realities of having to share limited space, sometimes one single room with several other people. This leaves me with the question whether the self-quarantine approach is observable in all cases? Perhaps it is just a trial and error response to curtailing the virus. Essentially, the approach seems practicable in a developed country like Germany. However, the Ghanaian situation seems doubtful given that a sizeable population live in slums and informal settlements where just a single room apartment is commonly shared by several family members, relatives or friends. The point here is people may avoid crowding and practice social distancing but the possibility of physical contact with virus carriers at home is simply unavoidable. Keeping in mind that the corona virus does not spread on its own, people spread it! Perhaps this raises another question whether self-quarantine is effective and sustainable?

Second, while people are staying at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19, how prepared are health care systems to handle unforeseen outbreaks and particularly, test potential cases? Many have opined that Germany's advanced health care delivery system is robust enough to contain the spread and also avoid a possible lock-down. This is because they can easily reach patients countrywide. On the other hand, the lack of affordable healthcare for all in Ghana point to concerns of poor people and those in remote areas accessing appropriate medical care.

The third and final aspect is the ability to enforce the self-quarantine or physical distancing measures. In Ghana, the government's decision to suspend all gatherings and meetings seems to have fallen on deaf ears. In fact, the government itself does not stand by its own directive. Instead of taking appropriate measures to handle COVID-19, the government is seeking legal backing to allow the continuation of an ongoing national ID card registration and voter registration exercise. One would assume that public health is more paramount at this moment, an issue that has been raised by many civil society organizations. Recently, Germany has banned meetings of more than 2 people and many people are taking measures to comply. Consequently, there is need for Ghana to put in mechanisms to enforce its chosen stance. Experts have warned that the continuous spread of COVID-19 will be accompanied by numerous social, and economic costs which are really difficult to estimate at this point. Therefore, how governments and political actors respond to this pandemic cannot be overstated.

ABUBAKARI AHMED

A letter from the Northern part of Ghana – Dear colleagues,

When I started following the international news about covid-19, I thought covid was overhyped. However, as the global spread increased and the realities of death tolls began to rise, I realized it was a new reality humankind will face in the 21st century.

So far, covid-19 is no respecter of religion, race, sex, and nationality. For the first time in many years, human beings have realized that we are all vulnerable.

We as humans do have our plans but nature (earth system) is the master planner. I had planned to take up my Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung postdoctoral fellowship in Germany between April and September 2020. It was going to be the first time I planned to give my twins and their mother a nice European experience while I undertake my research. However, covid-19 changed the entire plans and dreams of the year. While my family and I are unhappy about the disruptions, probably, the planet is a hidden beneficiary of the current crisis as the global economic system is disrupted.

That said, on the contrary, malaria kills an average 1,110 people every day globally.⁶ Is covid-19 more important than other deadly diseases? It is time the global system takes a comprehensive approach to environment and health crises.

Warm regards,

Abu

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malaria>



FANNY FRICK-TRZEBITZKY

My COVID everyday life

The questions I'm confronted with in my CoVid-everyday life with a kindergarden child and a baby are: what kind of values are we teaching our children when prohibiting them to meet friends out of fear to become sick, or rather to contract a disease that we do not want them to pass on to others? This very abstract form of 'solidarity' already difficult to grasp for adults is almost impossible to communicate to children, and we may have to unteach in several ways what they are learning these days and weeks. It seems to me that for my daughter 'Kontaktverbot' really means social distancing, not just physical distancing – both aspects are just too intertwined.

We are lucky / wealthy enough to have a private 'escape' in our allotment garden and for me to be on paid maternity leave. Our garden neighbours have been living permanently on their plot for several months now, their children many km away in Eastern Europe. I can only guess about the fears and risks that come with their informal residential status with borders closed, poor WASH facilities and the sudden loss of income opportunities as construction sites are closed. How can we prevent further deepening of unevenness in vulnerabilities/ adaptive capacities in Corona times?

Take care

LARA E. BARTELS

Water Inequality – or the need to wash hands

The need to wash hands to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is on everyone's lips. Being in Germany, I can wash my hands as often as I like. Our only problem concerning our (increased) practice of handwashing in the time of COVID-19 are dry hands, as a recent article in the German newspaper "Die Zeit" discussed. But what about those places where availability of and access to water is an essential problem?

The latest global estimates of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) shows that 3 billion people lack soap and water at home and 40% of health care facilities were not equipped to practice hand hygiene at points of care (see <https://washdata.org/>). This shows that while the COVID-19 virus disrupts the entire world, existing vulnerabilities are intensified and inequalities will be reproduced.

In our research on water access inequalities in Accra, Ghana we show that both lower but also higher-income groups do not have access to running water through the piped water network. Instead, people have to resort to private water providers (i.e. people who sell water in bulk via water tankers, resell water from tankers in smaller quantities or sell water from a private borehole). In particular, poor residents have to secure their access to water through a complex web of access strategies and mechanisms. In addition, they also pay, in the context of a private water market, relatively more for a unit of water as they cannot afford to buy and store water in bulk.

In the context of COVID-19 where actually more water for hygienic purposes is needed, the poor thus have to mobilize also more money or other mechanisms such as social relations to get sufficient access to water. Moreover, queueing for water in front of a public standpipe in high-density settlements does not really allow for "social distancing".

Will COVID-19 also teach us that it is more than time to address water inequalities?

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Reflections on the coronavirus pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean

After months of massive street protests against growing inequality, gender-based violence, corrupt political and economic elites, precarious work, the privatization of education and healthcare services, racism and relentless resource extraction in Latin America and the Caribbean, almost all of the large-scale demonstrations have abruptly stopped due to the coronavirus outbreak. This has provided an opportunity for governments in the region to reduce social opposition to their economic policies through the militarization of the public space. In Bolivia, for instance, the right-wing, interim government postponed indefinitely the presidential elections amidst the resurgence of the Movement Towards Socialism party. Ecuador's conservative government suspended public activities after facing mounting pressure from the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), peasants and labor unions to cancel an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan that included cuts in public spending. Similarly, the implementation of an IMF program aimed at eliminating oil subsidies sparked waves of anti-government demonstrations in Haiti. Chilean President Piñera delayed a referendum to change the constitution. Just a few months ago, the national government was under immense pressure from feminist groups, students, pensioners, unions and the Mapuche Nation to reduce social inequality. What started as demonstrations over the rise of public transport fares quickly became a massive movement demanding the end of violence against women, universal healthcare and the respect of Indigenous rights. In Mexico, feminist protests and strikes against the growing number of femicides dominated the political conversation. Protestors shut down workplaces to call for concrete action to tackle all forms of gender-based violence and inequality.

While governments say restrictive measures on public life are necessary to contain the spread of the virus, the implementation of quarantines has postponed social transformation demands. Why is this important? Because those who led the popular protests (i.e., women, peasants, students, retirees, unions, and Indigenous Peoples) are amongst the most socioeconomically affected by this pandemic. After decades of economic policies that have dismantled public services, most

governments in the region have limited resources and institutional capacity to implement measures tailored to the most vulnerable populations. How to urge people to wash their hands if they lack access to clean water? How to maintain social distancing in overcrowded households and public transportation? How to support informal economy workers without access to healthcare? These problems are intensified by the severe reduction in trading volumes, commodity prices, public and foreign investment, and remittances. As a result, governments are actively seeking international financial help despite the risks of increasing their external debt and reinforcing their dependence on exports of commodities in the long term.

The governments' ability to handle this crisis will have an impact on the popular protests, which, despite isolation measures, continue through other methods. Students, unions, feminist and LGBT movements in Colombia called for protests from balconies against austerity policies and the killings of Afro-descendants, peasant and Indigenous land defenders. In Mexico, small-scale farmers and environmental activists stopped the construction of a brewery in a referendum amid water grabbing concerns. Meanwhile, the Articulation of Indigenous People of Brazil (APIB) urged governments and corporations to immediately stop the expansion of mining, oil and gas extraction and logging in the Amazon.⁷ State authorities have told citizens to stay at home and suspended 'non-essential' activities. But why resource extraction industries still operate and who has the power to decide what activities are 'essential'? The introduction of the coronavirus to indigenous territories through the expansion of resource frontiers could have devastating effects on Indigenous communities, particularly on isolated tribes at higher risk of infectious diseases. As the COVID-19 revives fears of previous diseases that disproportionately affected Indigenous populations, many communities – already facing a lack of access to clean water and healthcare services, hunger and malnutrition, high unemployment, and overcrowding housing – have begun to impose entry bans on outsiders. In the face of this situation, communities are

⁷ Articulation of Indigenous People of Brazil. (2020, March 20). *Nota de APIB: el Gobierno debe presentar un plan de prevención y atención para evitar riesgos de contaminación por coronavirus en territorios indígenas*. APIB. <http://apib.info/2020/03/20/nota-de-apib-el-gobierno-debe-presentar-un-plan-de-prevencion-y-atencion-para-evitar-riesgos-de-contaminacion-por-coronavirus-en-territorios-indigenas/?lang=es>

exploring ways to build resilience through Indigenous knowledge and perhaps more importantly, to draw attention to the interrelations between the emergence of the coronavirus, global environmental change, and capitalism.⁸ Indigenous peoples have, for example, reiterated the importance of building reciprocal relations with other living things⁹. Traditional Indigenous healing approaches contrast sharply with public health policies rooted in colonial and racial legacies. Rather than addressing the roots of inequalities, these policies tend to focus on treating diseases.

This prompts us to critically think about the notion of health and its links to broader sociopolitical, economic, cultural and environmental issues. Knowledge production plays here a crucial role. How are, for example, universities and independent research institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean responding to the multiple existing crises exacerbated by the coronavirus? The Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), for instance, through its different research groups (e.g., Epistemologies of the South, Afro-descendants and counterhegemonic perspectives, Anticapitalism, Anti-Patriarchy Struggles, Popular Economies, Political Ecologies of the South and Health Sovereignities) works with grassroots organizations and makes academic material available to a broader audience. These collaborations are important to create spaces for critical reflection and to support popular movements' struggles against racism, extractivism, gender-based violence, colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.

⁸ Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin. (2020, March 13). *Pueblo Inga Originario del Putumayo denuncia graves amenazas por defender su territorio Ancestral*. COICA. <https://coica.org.ec/pueblo-inga-originario-del-putumayo-denuncia-graves-amenazas-por-defender-su-territorio-ancestral/>

⁹ National Indigenous Organization of Colombia. (2020, March 29). *Orientaciones sobre Medicina Tradicional e Intercultural en el marco del Plan de Contingencia*. ONIC. www.onic.org

