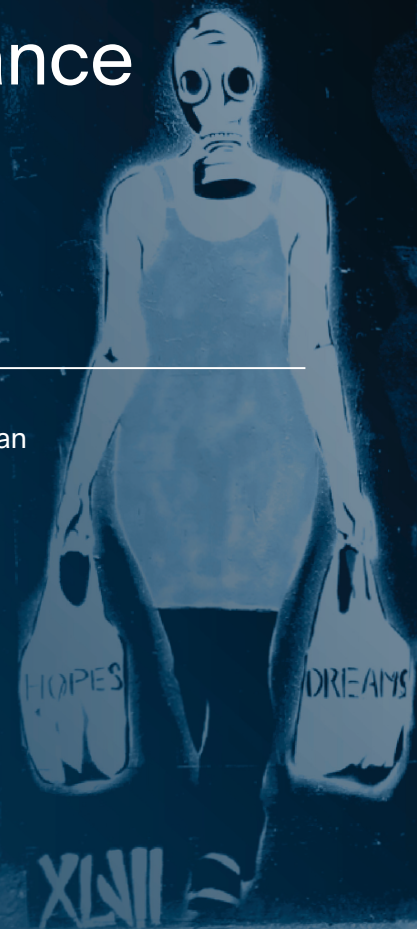Special Issue Reprint

Narratives of Resistance in Everyday Lives and the Covid Crisis

Edited by
Molly Andrews, Paul Nesbitt-Larking and Kesi Mahendran

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Preface

From its Greek origins, Krisis conveys more than the current English usage of "crisis". There are at least three dominant interpretations, each of which have been of importance to us in thinking through the social and political impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the matter of judgment, notably the normative assessment of justice, equity, right, and wrong; secondly, Krisis as division, separation, or forcing apart; and, finally, Krisis as transformation, the moment of decision or turning point. Whatever else might be said of the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it set in play a series of social, medical, economic, cultural, and political transformations that were widely experienced as sudden, thoroughgoing, disruptive, and anxiety-inducing.

As with other generational traumas, the pandemic's prominence and urgency conditioned a rapid and widespread shift in academic research. Tens of thousands of global scholars turned our attention toward various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are now hundreds of thousands of articles on the COVID-19 pandemic. We the contributors, as social scientists with backgrounds in narrative social and political psychology, turned our attention to the seismic impact of the pandemic on social forces and social relations across a range of settings. We wanted to know both how the response to the pandemic was shaping pre-existing political societies, and how the experience of living though the pandemic might (re)order the political world as we understood it.

Among the earliest and most sudden transformations effected by the global pandemic was a shift from the centralized physical workplace to the relative remoteness of home settings and the two-dimensional worlds of teleconferencing and other communications platforms. Within a matter of days we decamped from our institutions and reset our teaching, committee work, and research contacts through an intensive process of learning new technologies and ways of interacting. One of us, Molly Andrews, initiated a dialogue via teleconferencing on these matters of our common interest. We decided to develop our narrative analyses of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and were particularly interested in how the experience of the pandemic might reshape the socially and politically familiar, such as populism or liberal democracy, and how it might give rise to novel expressions of political and social life. Would the pandemic force people apart or bring them closer together, or both in certain ways? Many other scholars had already been thinking about polarization and divisions in political societies and the decline of consensus politics. We wanted to know the impact of the pandemic on these pre-existing fault lines. We decided to approach our colleagues and collaborators to build upon our knowledge and understanding.

The result, following months of editorial outreach and consultations, was this volume. It exceeded our expectations in both scope and depth, and we express our deep gratitude to our contributors. Taken together, they convey the range and diversity of responses toward the pandemic across 10 global settings, expressing both the insecurities and uncertainties of disrupted lives as well as the social and political opportunities afforded by those very disruptions. For better or worse, responses to the pandemic wrenched many people into new ways of seeing and new ways of being. Such new perspectives conditioned new awareness and laid bare the inequalities and injustices of existing social orders, but also opened up the possibility of hope. The chapters in this volume set out an impressive range of interpretations of political narratives through the COVID-19 pandemic, capturing the complexes of positionalities, intersectionalities, and identifications.

Our volume is about the pandemic, but it has also been put together through the pandemic. This has called upon our resources, our patience, and our energy, and it has stretched our social scientific knowledge and understanding. We are profoundly grateful to our fine contributors: Jill Bradbury, Tereza Capelos, Mark David McGregor Davis, Mieasia Edwards, Anthony English, Mastoureh Fathi,

Michelle Fine, José Jiménez, Catarina Kinnvall, Jamilson Bernardo de Lemos, Wendy Luttrell, James White McAuley, Sue Nieland, Ellen Nield, Ann Phoenix, Mikko Salmela, Amit Singh, and Corinne Squire. Our gratitude also goes out to the indefatigable and always positive Yvaine Sun of Social Sciences and the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI). Yvaine has been with us each step of the way in the process of bringing this collection together.

Molly Andrews, Paul Nesbitt-Larking, and Kesi Mahendran
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Editorial

Foreword: Narrative Convictions in "Revolting" Times

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Convictions:

(1)   *strongly held beliefs, firmly felt and enacted*
(2)   *consequence of being criminalized*

Globally, we are awash in stories; here in the U.S., stories circulate about abortion, refugees, Black unarmed men and women shot by police, innocent victims of gun violence, and about boys who shoot to kill. A stunning little essay by Rebecca Traister, "the abortion stories we do not tell" (Traister 2022) interrogates the responsibility of activists, scholars, artists and journalists to think through the ethics/praxis/political consequences of narrative inquiry; which stories we circulate and which ones we censor. Traister worries that for decades activists/scholars have selectively told the "good" abortion stories, framing abortion as a rationale response to a tragic circumstance—reproducing, in the name of protection, the silence and shame that conservatives laminate on the decision to abort, excluding all the messy, bloody, complicated or just casual and not-so consequential stories of abortions, ceding space for a Right Wing narrative assault to pounce. Traister concludes her essay:

> *"The additional horror is that the value of abortion stories may be about to shift in a sickening direction. We are at a terrible crossroads at which the stories of abortion—the testimony—may go from being a tool that could have been deployed on behalf of those needing care to a tool used against them".*

In this preface, I want to think about the convictions enacted by narrative doulas in this volume. You are about to be engaged by critical scholars accompanying, historicizing, curating both births and terminations of stories, obligating us to think with theory and care about how these stories form and how they will enter a world of politics eager to celebrate, sanitize, monetize, romanticize, discredit, criminalize or exceptionalize these stories. And so we might ask the following.

1. What Is Our Debt—As Writers/Researchers/Scholars—In the Midst of Multiple Crises?

Almost a century ago, in 1930, Antonio Gramsci scribbled in a prison cell, "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum, a variety of morbid symptoms appear".

Today we drown in morbid symptoms indeed. But chronicling the morbid symptoms alone may be a dangerous narrative cul de sac, swelling despair and a sense of hopelessness.

Each essay you are about to read sketches an exquisite, braided narrative—stitching theory and multiply voiced texts—as a "case" about life in/before/during COVID-19 in South Korea, Canada, South Africa, New York City, Australia, Iran, India, Scotland, the UK and Sweden. Morbid symptoms but so much more. The writers mobilize a range of theoretical, epistemic, methodological and analytic affordances to generate intersectional montages of simmering rage/desire, stories of possibility and activism, dark inquiries into spaces of ressentiment and searing critique of state-borne ideologies dedicated to quell protest and circulate pseudo-science. The essays you are about to engage

are beautifully curated to provoke/invite/reveal new lines of analysis, new ways of see-ing/writing/researching/imagining/resisting this moment of what Massey and Hall (2010) would call conjunctural crisis—when seemingly autonomous forces converge, fracturing into rupture and rage, releasing the deadly and unevenly catastrophic, and also stirring the aesthetic imagination for what else might be possible.

This remarkable theoretical/methodological assemblage of critical narrative thinkers offers thoughtful and careful paths for scholars to consider how to "be of use"—in times when despair is high, sense of helplessness weighs heavy, when justice seems beyond words or logics or clever metaphors, democracy seems to be waning, when simply bearing witness feels lame. I have read all the essays, seeking to cull narrative convictions in crisis; to distill what these writers are asking us to take seriously about our obligations to write in "revolting times".

My old friend Greene (2007), existential philosopher extraordinaire, in an essay called Imagination and the healing arts, distinguished between experiences that are anesthetic—numbing, and those that are aesthetic—provocative and wide-awakening. The writers in this volume indulge us to write-in-crisis, with narrative convictions, and toward aesthetic provocation.

2. To Destabilize, Historicize and Racialize the "Object" of Inquiry

As you enter these texts you will notice that the presumed "object" of inquiry—COVID-19 shape shifts. Across the pages, COVID-19 is a trickster that attacks, destabilizes, disfigures, reveals the social order, obscures as much, shape shifts into a political artifice, and unleases a flood of avarice, greed, evil, violence, sweet yearnings and freedom dreams. It is, of course, intersectional.

So we arrive at our first narrative conviction—no matter what the topic—critical narrative scholars have a response-ability to destabilize the "construct" or "question" under scrutiny; leave it open, let it breathe like a good wine; listen closely to the nuances; consider what is being foreclosed by this seemingly open question. Take COVID-19—if we singularize the crisis we obscure the tentacles COVID-19 ensnared with housing struggles, physical and mental health, racial injustice, policing, child protective services, schooling, immigration anxieties . . . We must complicate, racialize and gender, historicize and render intersectional, the "thing"—in this case the COVID-19 crisis—that seems so clear, so shared, so universal, so containable. If we keep the "thing" a "thing"—as psychologists like to do when we operationalize or replicate—we literally sever the tendrils of class, race, gender, disability, immigration status that attach, expand and mutate the shape of the crisis, and the aftermath. When researching morbid symptoms or any downstream "outcome", we must leave ourselves open to how constructs transform depending on history, context, struggles . . . This very theoretical and epistemic openness anchors researchers in an accountability dynamic with the communities we accompany in our scholarship.

The scholars gathered in this volume know well the need to destabilize, and open, the crisis as it bled into every sphere of public and intimate life. Throughout the volume, you will read about these wildly diverse embodiments, antecedents and aftermath of the virus. You will hear how privilege encased the virus, and how poverty/communities under siege were sacrificed, a breeding ground without state protection. COVID-19 metasticized, for some, into ressentiment against women, immigrants, communities of color; COVID-19 accompanied the endless video looping of the state sponsored murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and marked a(nother) moment of racial uprising, in the U.S. and globally, pouring into streets, demanding justice. At the same time, COVID-19 also sparked sweet solidarities in a range of spaces, on-line and in person: within queer communities, among those long ill/activist/HIV positive/experienced with mutual aid, across generations in the same household.

The narratives reproduced in this volume, and the accompanying analyses, sketch this landscape of COVID's ravages and ruptures; make visible how COVID-19 disoriented us all but hitchhiked relentlessly and dug into those already most vulnerable; how it surprised

us with new understandings and new confusions; how we bore witness to structural racism/classism/misogyny perhaps previously unnoticed or known too well; how new identities/relationships/households/labor arrangements materialized.

During the COVID-19 era, new forms of interdependence were glaringly on display: dangerous and loving interdependencies. In these narratives, thanks to the thoughtful and delicate analytic hands of the writers, we can hear how lives are inter-laced; stories are braided; fears are shared and activisms are mobilized. We are invited to listen to the soft deposits of yearning and refusals; that is, whispers of "no, we will not succumb" and "yes, we stand together". These articles testify to bumpy but collective survivance embraced in struggle. Therefore, we come to our second conviction.

3. Challenging the Dominant Story

Years ago, in El Salvador, Jesuit priest/activist/scholar/liberation theologian Martin-Baró (1994) argued that the project of social inquiry must be to challenge the dominant story; to contest the narratives circulated by the state and elites; to recover and honor the silenced/buried/suppressed stories of the people, percolating in the margins. He framed this as "liberation psychology"—a sister to liberation theology.

Here, I suggest a second narrative conviction: our obligation to gather/analyze/co-construct narratives that challenge dominant lies, to listen carefully and gently for the critique, to make public the private issues that penetrate bodies and minds in shame and silence, and to theorize the quiet and bold gestures toward resistance.

In this volume, the "challenge" can be read at multiple levels. Scholars including Corinne Squire, Anne Phoenix, Wendy Luttrell and the NYC Collective, and Jill Bradbury spend time and language in their articles curating narratives of refusal and speaking back through interviews, social media, braided narratives (Bradbury) and participatory surveys/interviews. In their articles they animate the soft and loud deposits of refusal; everyday people's claims to dignity and justice, and the smothered desires of those who have been unheard.

At the same time, but at another scale, Mastoureh Fathi, Mark Davis and Catarina Kinnvall and Amit Singh theorize and deconstruct the duplicitous nature and stickiness of state-sponsored ideologies and fantasies, designed to deflect, delude and deny; to shift blame, avoid accountabilities and torque public rage away from the state or racial capitalism. Both layers of narrative challenge are crucial to the project of unraveling dominant stories.

Speaking Back in Braided Tongues: Corinne Squire presents narrative accounts of persons living through dual pandemics, with HIV, enacting "strong attempts to resist, restore and reconstruct" their citizenships, mapping what Squire calls "citizenly technologies". While these bold re-articulations of self do not deny that significant assaults on health, economic and psychosocial "citizenship" endured in austerity regimes, they do speak through what the author calls "histories of dissent"—up against a savage machine of racial capitalism, heterosexism, anti-disability policies and attempts to render them structurally "disposable". And yet through Squire's piece, like so many others, we hear rage-ful and joy-ful reassertions of what Sara Ahmed would call "willful subjects" (Ahmed 2014)—insisting on being heard with dignity and collective power.

Like Squire, Anne Phoenix traces and analyses a stunning splash of online racialized accounts of COVID-19 posted on social media, as "intertextual narratives that protest against racism and call for resistance to the racisms they identify". While the posters she is working with do "not overtly position themselves as calling for change, their narratives . . . resist current configurations . . . " Phoenix models for us how we listen for/theorize "hidden transcripts of resistance" (Scott 1990) as she animates the braiding of loss and desire, the suturing of rage and demand when she writes: "the transformational conjunctions... have inspired and re-inspired pain, anger and narratives of resistance to the inequities the conjunctions have exposed . . . producing new political narratives that can inspire hope and new social understandings".

In a third enactment of what I am calling braided narratives, with stunningly creative design of online participatory surveys and in-depth interviews with NYC Parents Speaking Out, in English, Spanish and Chinese, Wendy Luttrell and colleagues gathered narratives from a broad base of NYC parents/guardians cataloguing their joys/concerns/experiences/insights and incites during the early days of lock down, staccato moments of school openings and closings, dreary days of remote learning, and hearing what their children were—and were not learning. In an innovative methodological twist, each respondent could add questions to the on-line survey to which the next "generation" of respondents could reply. Through their parent/educator collective, Luttrell and colleagues present in this essay both a portrait of consensus stories—remarkably popular commitments to radical education, and they present narrative sketches of parenting blues and creativities. Analytically, across languages, boroughs and methods, Luttrell et al. retrieve a set of threads that connect, us all, in our very different circumstances, as a shared experience, attentive to significant variation and enduring power inequities.

Importantly for Luttrell et al., like Phoenix and Squire, even as their research opened with COVID, respondents pivoted to conversations and questions about white supremacy, racial dynamics and racialized state violence in and around schools. Luttrell et al. report that a full 77% agreed that "schools should teach about the damages of white supremacy" and "about the 'Black Lives Matter' movement". In this on line survey, it is evident that the catastrophic reach of the "virus" swelled far beyond COVID—stretching toward the structural and social enactments of racism affecting children in and out of schools. Luttrell and colleagues close their essay with a question: "How do we create the conditions to meet parents' desires . . . to protect Black children's innocence while also preparing them to survive and struggle?" And they respond with conviction: "We ally with children, parents, teachers, communities, school, educational and social policy. [This} political imperative is an open question about how, not if or why".

With a shared ethical and rhetorical commitment to writing/teaching/theorizing "between", Jill Bradbury, teaching and writing in South Africa, introduces a powerful praxis of braided narratives. While her work will be addressed more extensively below, the epistemic commitments woven into her article Learning to Resist, Resisting to Learn, writing in dialogue, melting the boundaries of knowledge making, rendering porous the membranes that link/separate learning and living, sit in sweet resonance beside Squire, Phoenix and Luttrell et al.:

> *My narrative as a teacher is told in dialogue with the stories of students, with the textual traditions of narrative and other psychosocial theories, in inter disciplinary creative conversation with colleagues, and with voices from the remarkable real-time political and social commentary in the global media space. This approach instantiates one of the primary provocations of the pandemic to my pedagogical practice: to render the boundaries between sources of knowledge and forms of knowledge-making, between theory and practice, between learning and living, more porous. The macro-politics of the global crisis are here concentrated in a seemingly insignificant educational space . . . [animating] the (im)possibilities for resistance in the "multiple micropolitical practices" of daily activism of interventions in and on the world we inhabit . . . in tune with the present but resisting its murderous tendencies".* (p. 423)

Across wildly different contexts but in a shared historic moment, in New York, Johannesburg and London, these researchers take up the work of narrative doulas attending exquisitely to how narratives are produced, how they are labored and delivered, how they enter the fresh (!) air of the political arena; comforting, turning and supporting the birth of new complex, bloody and joyful narratives, re-telling what was/is/might be.

While Phoenix, Luttrell, Squire and Bradbury escorted us to hear/see/feel/appreciate the resistance and indulge our desire to feel the vibrant refusals and creative resistance and livingness of marginalized communities, the articles authored by Fathi, Davis and Kinnvall and Singh do a different kind of narrative labor: they unpack dominant, state-sponsored

ideologies mobilized, with a vengeance, to smother or seduce the resistance. And this part of the story we have an obligation to chronicle as well.

Deconstructing State Lies: While it is crucial to listen, attentively and closely, to the narratives of those impacted, to document the flesh piercing "morbid symptoms" in our midst, and the joy of resistance, a few of these writers also turn our attention to state sponsored/circulated discourses designed to instill amnesia, encourage us to not-see, and dedicated to re-present racialized/classed struggles as individualized concerns or "choices".

Mark Davis, in writing "Live with the virus" accomplishes two entwined narrative ends. First, he interrogates a far too familiar trope as he decries state mandates to "live with the virus" as an ideological attempt to induce "pandemic amnesia" and "erasure of critical reflection", (not ironically) accompanied by material cuts in state sponsored health research. But second, Davis also theorizes the brilliance of community survivance despite state-sponsored betrayal (Vizenor 2008) as he draws on the "affective biopolitics [mobilized] in the service of community-built health sustaining commons"—evidenced by those who have long embodied health risks only worsened by COVID-19. Davis makes visible the rich forms of mutual aid already practiced, for decades, in historically "excluded communities" and calls forth the wisdom marinating in those quarters to build a health-sustaining commons nourished with capillaries of "vital interdependence".

Still stretching COVID-19 well beyond its epidemic borders, Mastoureh Fathi turns over COVID gaze toward the devastating housing inequities confronted by migrants exacerbated by the virus. Fathi draws on critical geographies to interrogate how migrants are housed and unhoused in Europe—before COVID-19, during and since. She unpacks how this multi-headed crisis of immigration, racism, housing inequities and COVID-19 has been officially re-cast and swept away until the language of "choice". Fathi introduces, instead, a new critical construct "unhome" to be deployed as an "analytical concept—a place where one is forced to stay . . . devoid of emotional attachments".

Finally, moving to the pernicious intersection of state power and popular culture, Catarina Kinnvall and Amit Singh have crafted an elegant essay, "Resisting Hindutva: Popular culture, the COVID crisis and fantasy-narratives of gendered bodies in India". In this article, Kinnvall and Singh remind readers to beware the strategic maneuvers of state/elite/ideological commitments permeating popular culture to feed and massify denial and pseudoscience. Kinnvall and Singh alert us to "fantasy narratives" drip fed and circulated through "traditional, digital media discourses as well as popular culture," designed to "counteract resistance"—anchored in nostalgic representations of motherhood and seductive pseudoscience, able to "nativize an ontological security crisis" traveling through bodies, families, communities and nation states during the COVID-19 years. This essay is a crucial addition to the volume, stretching the narrative convictions from morbid symptoms, through resistance and then back to mutated, culturally pervasive forms of hegemonic control through popular media. We are reminded that it is crucial to document the often disturbing mo(u)rning after.

4. A Minor, but Crucial Conviction: To Theorize the (Very) Dark

Tereza Capelos, Ellen Nield and Mikko Salmela interrupt—with dignity—the powerful stories of solidarity, desire and vital interdependence seasoning this volume to remind us of the importance of listening to the dark, vicious rhetorics of ressentiment, marinating and fortifying through toxic masculinity across the COVID years. By analyzing right wing online discussions among young Korean men, we can hear how they "transmute grievances" into affects, identities and behaviors aligned with misogyny, anti-woman, anti-military and anti-globalization rants; we hear these men frozen in the bile of projection and accusations of "stolen" selves. While this piece is difficult to want to read, and we might want to wish this were a small, idiosyncratic, ethnographically specific case—but I fear these dynamics of toxic masculinity are as fast-growing and rapidly circulating and contaminating as the original virus. We are indebted to Capelos et al. for confronting our

desire to make small this massive global and rising assault; that is, to attend closely to the rapidly accumulating and coagulating streams of toxicity building up in our midst.

5. Embrace Our Irresistible Entanglements: A Conviction of Heart, Soul, Community and Science

Feminist philosopher of science Karen Barad studies physics. She argues that "objects, processes and agencies of observation do not merely co-exist in interactive relation to another. They are formed through intra-action. They are mutually constituted" (Barad 2007, p. 199).

Barad is drawing on physics but her work stretches gracefully into social sciences, insisting that we recognize our thick interdependencies; that we theorize relations "between" people, and between humans and non-humans, as "intra-actions" and not inter-actions. This insight/incite is a radical contestation of the historic and hegemonic individualism of traditional psychology.

Perhaps the most elegant enactment of entanglement as epistemic justice/theory and methods, is written by Jill Bradbury, in her stunning piece, Learning to Resist and Resisting to Learn. In this article Bradbury offers an elegant analytic/writing genre of sweet and knotty entanglements, stitching narratives of auto-ethnography and memoir with writings by her students, and emails/texts from colleagues, on a South African campus where questions about COVID quickly metabolized to demands for racial justice and against white supremacy.

Bradbury is herself always a compelling guide to the "betweens": in teaching/learning, space/time travel, memory/imagination, and Self/Other. She theorizes and narrates these affective and political hyphens deliberately and aesthetically. Bradbury takes us back and slows us down, holding our hands as we all remember the optimism aroused when reading Arundhati Roy's early 2020 promise of the pandemic as a portal; her warning that we not 'drag the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas . . . " that we ready ourselves to "imagine another world" (Roy 2020). And then Bradbury, now entangled with readers' emotions, reminds us that soon thereafter we were assaulted institutionally and politically by "anxious attempts to realign strange and estranging conditions with the world as a we knew it and strategies of containment and control". Bradbury ends the piece with an email or text exchange among colleagues who formed a commons for/with/beside one another, where someone wrote: "Wow! When we think together! The beauty that emerges!" (if you are moved by entangled methods, please find a new book by Nishida 2022).

6. Radical Hope and the Obligation to Write

In the early days of COVID-19, an essay circulated within psychology, written collaboratively by critical race psychologists Mosley et al. (2020) coining the term Radical Hope as form of livingness and as an epistemic/methodological commitment. Mosley et al. were nudging practitioners, teachers and scholars to address oppression and resistance, to theorize history and imagination, and to take seriously our contributions to individual and collective well-being, fueled by radical hope.

With this prompt, we come to our final narrative conviction embedded in this volume: Radical hope and the obligation to write. Two articles speak eloquently to the question: What have we learned within the COVID-19 blues that might move us toward more just, inclusive commons?

In an(other) truly elegant and provocatively aesthetic research design, Kesi Mahendran et al. have unearthed what we perhaps might hope for: there seems to be a strong global desire for a border-free world. Taking seriously this finding, Mahendran and colleagues—in a gesture toward answer-ability—encourage a radical turn by psychologists obsessed with rising nationalisms. They invite "scholars [who] are preoccupied with xenophobic nationalism and the rise of nationalistic forms of populism and are actively engaged in studying this." to turn away from "the protectionism tensions that are likely to increase during the

austerities of post-pandemic recovery" and engage instead in "directly investigating the public's narratives of and engagement with multilateralism and how this relates to their ideals about the world, their worldviews and increasingly their planetviews". Mahendran and colleagues implore scholars to stop fetishizing (and naturalizing) the desire to separate/build walls/exclude/protect Self against Others, and instead that we explore a popular (if submerged) desire for border free world, and explore empirically how such a rich, inclusive planetview might evolve from/against multilateralism.

With a similar ethic, and analytic eye on radical hope, Jim McAuley and Paul Nesbitt-Larking combine narrative and thematic analysis drawn from Canadian Periodicals Index, when they foreshadow what might lay ahead. Scouring a range of data sources, they suggest that just maybe we may be on the cusp of: "A renaissance in rationality and evidence-based science; a return to social equality and equity, including wage equity and guaranteed incomes; a reimagining of the interventionist state in response to crises in economy, society, the welfare state, and social order; a reorientation to the local and communitarian, with reference in particular to solidaristic mutual aid, community animation, local sourcing and craft production; and the reinvention of democracy through deeply participation and deliberative dialogical decision making". While they acknowledge the Right wing rants of the Canadian Convoy, they sketch a prefigured future . . . "Those who anticipated a return to pre-pandemic normality may be shocked to find that many of the previous systems, structures, norms, markets and employment are no longer there to return to".

This volume of essays reads like a painful love letter to solidarity studies, animating in vibrant detail our interdependence in livingness, in danger and in method. I surrender then to Toni Morrison who tells us "There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. This is how civilizations heal".

And so, to Antonio Gramsci, almost a century later, we regret that we find ourselves surrounded indeed and still with morbid systems; and to Toni Morrison, thank you for the courage, insisting on our obligation to write (Gramsci 1971). Authors of these stunning articles have gifted us with a complex and deliciously unstable framing of COVID-19, but a clear-eyed analysis of its stratified legacy. They have modelled the power of listening intently for refusals, blues and resistance, and spinning braided narratives. They have embodied and acted upon the courage to dive into the vicious discursive bile rising under our feet. They have revealed the significance of deconstructing state-talk designed to induce amnesia and austerity, and they have accompanied us on the sweet search for radically new political narratives that take seriously our yearning for the commons.

We end, then, with a new worry, a *double entendre of narrative conviction*.

In a recent interview with Bracey Sherman, from WE TESTIFY, a website dedicated to archiving and publicizing abortion stories an just after the Dodd decision hollowed Roe v. Wade, many states unleashed an avalanche of laws that could criminalize women, medical practitioners and taxi drivers who carry women across state lines. Sherman poses a new challenge to narrative doulas:

> *"How do we protect storytellers?" asks Bracey Sherman. Speaking of some who have worked with We Testify, she says, "we have a number of storytellers who self-manage their abortions. I want them to be able to share their stories, and I don't want to have to visit them in jail.* (quoted in Traister 2022)

Convictions are never fully enacted; may narrative convictions always haunt us lovingly.

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Everyday Narratives of Resistance and Reconfigurations of Political Protest after the Pandemic—Editors' Introduction

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Perhaps one of the most demanding challenges of the arrival of the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020 was the extent to which it arrived on top of a series of existing global crises. These were related to austerity measures after the global recession; historically high levels of refugee-related movement; the climate emergency; and crucially for us as political psychologists, the development of seemingly unstoppable conditions of rising populism, anti-politics, anti-democracy, increased authoritarian policing, and civil restrictions on protest. The central question which brings together the contributing authors and editors of this Special Issue on narratives of resistance in everyday life is whether features of this pandemic context, its social restrictions, the grand narratives of cross-border cooperation such as gene sequencing and vaccine development, and newfound narratives of togetherness would initiate a reconfiguration of political protest. Does the experience of the pandemic create the opportunity for citizens to develop more equitable worlds, to revisit our priorities, and to realize what counts?

This focus of this Special Issue can best be understood by adopting a developmental lens. The story starts back in early 2020, as the coronavirus was making its entry onto the world stage. In the UK—where two of us are located—the announcement by the World Health Organization on 30 January of a public health emergency, coincided uneasily with the deadline for the UK to exit the European Union on 31 January 2020. In what have been described as the 'lost 38 days' (Haddon 2020), the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, missed the first five COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms) emergency meetings which were designed to put in place the necessary contingencies. The first Cobra meeting he chaired was not until 3 March, eight days before the World Health Organization declared the virus a global pandemic. By 17 March, the UK government reversed its earlier policy and embraced a strategy of social distancing. It is not surprising that at that time, many of us who had been participating in numerous protests in the UK wondered what the impact of this would be on demonstrations, which had been particularly widespread in the previous year.

On 19 October 2019, London had seen one of the biggest protests in its history, with an estimated one million people participating in the 'People's Vote', the fourth, and largest, of the anti-Brexit demonstrations since the passing of the referendum in June 2016. The month before that, the UK had seen its largest ever climate protests across the country, with an estimated 350,000 taking to the streets. Additionally, the month before that, Boris Johnson's decision to suspend parliament sparked thousands of British citizens to protest against the actions of their government.

And that was just in Britain. In many other parts of the world, citizens were rising against the policies of their government.

Four decades of highly bureaucratized neoliberal austerity measures and deregulated markets had conditioned a crisis of confidence in the State as an instrument to address injustices and material inequalities. Support for mainstream political parties, voter turnout,

and trust in government declined across a wide range of national settings. The immediate political backdrop to the COVID-19 years was a sharp turn to right-wing populism, with its emphasis on borders, exclusions, and 'us and them' politics, under the leadership of unorthodox, brash, and self-promoting leaders promising to return polities to the way they were in the mythologized past and positioning themselves as anti-elite outsiders.

When India passed the Citizenship Amendment Act and introduced the National Register of Citizens in December 2019, rescinding and restricting access to Indian citizenship, violent protests erupted around the country. The government swiftly responded by prohibiting the gathering of more than four people in a public space. (Less than a year later, the government would pass three farm bills which attracted even larger protests; ultimately, the government retracted the bills).

The pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019–2020 became well known around the world, with their novel methodology to 'be water' and 'climb the mountain in a different way.' The protests were amongst the largest in Hong Kong's history and culminated in June 2020 with the imprisonment of countless activists and the passing of the National Security Law, effectively suppressing the right to protest.

Indeed, in autumn 2019, many countries around the globe experienced massive civil unrest. According to the Global Protest Tracker (https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker, accessed on 1 January 2020), these countries had protests of 100,000 or more in October 2019 alone: Bolivia ('Wild Fire' protests, 1.5 million), Chile (subway fare protests, 1 million), Guinea (term limit protests, more than 100,000), and Lebanon (October Movement protest, more than 1 million).

Additionally, this was part of a larger trend: the 2020 Global Peace Index showed that 'In the eight years leading up to 2018, the available comparable global data shows a 102 per cent increase in the number of riots, general strikes and anti-government demonstrations' (https://www.visionofhumanity.org/angry-protests-in-britain-reflect-global-trend-of-civil-unrest/, accessed on 1 January 2020).

So, this was the broad political context into which the coronavirus pandemic entered the world in the first quarter of 2020.

In May 2020, we received an invitation from the editors of *Social Sciences* to guest edit a Special Issue of the journal, on the topic of 'Creating Lives in Everyday Narratives'. Given the intensity of the political fallout which the pandemic had already caused, we were interested in how everyday lives of political resistance would be reconfigured in the new world of social distancing and 'stay at home' imperatives. Already, we had seen a retrenchment of civil liberties in countries around the world (see the COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker (https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/, accessed on 1 January 2020) for relevant data. This website tracks several different aspects of the health of 'civic space', including emergency declarations and limitations on freedom of speech). However, it is the category of measures affecting the right to assemble which initially interested us here. At the time of writing, there are currently 156 countries which have measures in place regulating the right of citizens to assemble, some of these mentioned above. Many, although not all, of these pertain to governments legislating the reduced right to freedom of movement due to the coronavirus, e.g., aimed at limiting contagion. However, there are others which more directly concern assembly for political protest. One such case is that of the Policing Bill, which became the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act on 26 April 2022 in the UK. This Act, which had seen 'Kill the Bill' protests across the UK, included challenges from politicians, police officers, three former Prime Ministers, and the public. Despite these coalitions of resistance, this new policing act gives the police power to impose noise restrictions on protests, to stop one-person protests, and to create a buffer zone around the Houses of Parliament.

In the early months of the pandemic—specifically March, April, and early May 2020—we were not alone in wondering if forms of political protest would be altered by requirements to stay at home, and when outdoors, to keep socially distant. As political psychologists, we revisited Gene Sharp's ([1973] 2020) work from nearly half a century ago in which he

identified 198 methods of non-violent protest and wondered if this new pandemic context would initiate a reconfiguration of political protest. During this moment of our first 'taste' of the coronavirus pandemic, many of us spent hours, days, and weeks consuming news of and in a world which had effectively stopped. For those of us with access to digital media, we were provoked to think of this unusual moment as a critical turning point in the way the global economy 'did business'. We found reasons for hopefulness amid evidence for despair. Already in April 2020, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace issued a report in which they identified areas of pandemic-related activism (https://carnegieendowment.org/ 2020/04/21/civil-society-and-coronavirus-dynamism-despite-disruption-pub-81592, accessed on 1 January 2020), which included the categories of mutual aid initiatives, repurposing initiatives (filling gaps left by the state), and campaigns fighting disinformation. Rebecca Solnit (2020) echoed this message, with her statement that 'the impossible has already happened', showing that the crisis of the pandemic had already led to extending worker's rights and benefits, early release of prisoners, sheltering the homeless, and temporary citizenship for migrants and asylum seekers. Although she was writing in the first week of April, less than a month after the declaration of the world pandemic, she already identified this moment as a crossroad which could 'teach us about hope'. This was the same week that Arundhati Roy published her iconic article, framing the pandemic as 'a portal':

> Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (Roy 2020)

Despite or perhaps because of the disruption of the world as we knew it, somehow, there was a sense for some that we were in a moment of possibility, one which demanded a rethinking of our lives and how we as inhabitants of the world might sustainably co-exist. Looking back on those days now, it is hard for some of us to remember our desperate hope for hope, and our ability to find potential in even some of the darkest corners.

Cornel West asks 'how do you sustain a democratic hope in bleak times?' and then turns to describe resistance as 'a historical process with many moments of disruption' (West 2021, cited by Corinne Squire et al. 2022). If the first few months of the pandemic represented a moment of disrupted organized political resistance of a conventional kind, that came abruptly to an end on 25 May 2020 (several weeks after we received the invitation to guest edit this Special Issue). On that date, when US policeman Derek Chauvin murdered the unarmed George Floyd by blocking his airwaves for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds, his cries of 'I can't breathe' were heard around the world. This was a critical turning point in the course of pandemic political protest, where, despite the risk of contagion, millions of people gathered in disparate locations around the world with the rallying cry that 'Black Lives Matter'. In the United States alone, polls estimate that, in the summer of 2020, between 15 and 26 million participated in demonstrations against racially motivated police brutality, rendering it the largest protest movement in US history (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html, accessed on 1 January 2020). However, the protests were not limited to the United States; indeed, they occurred in over 60 countries and on all seven continents, creating a global legacy of the Floyd murder, as the protest against racist brutality resonated with marginalized communities around the world.

Protests against racialized brutality continue to resound across the world, for example, the fatal beating in 2023 of 29-year-old black Tyre Nichols who received 71 impossible and contradictory commands within 13 minutes from a gang of Memphis police officers. Arguably, it is now possible for serving police officers to be charged with murder, a shift in parameters of resistance unseen before the pandemic.

In parallel, another global form of organized resistance began to take shape: that against state interference mandating vaccines and other measures to limit contagion of

the virus. According to the Global Protest Tracker, twenty-seven countries experienced protests relating to lockdown and/or other restrictions related to the coronavirus. When we originally conceived of this Special Issue on political resistance during the pandemic, we did not foresee that this would become such a significant source of protests for much of the world. That this has been so serves to remind us of the full spectrum of anti-government political protests.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (2021) published its Global State of Democracy Report, stating that, simply put, the previous two years 'had not been good for democracy'. Indeed, three times as many countries are moving in the direction of authoritarianism as are moving towards democracy (https://www.idea.int/gsod/, accessed on 1 January 2020).

> In the context of the pandemic, many democratic governments have adopted questionable restrictions to fundamental freedoms that, in many cases, mimic the practices of authoritarian regimes. Democratic backsliding, namely the sustained and deliberate process of subversion of basic democratic tenets by political actors and governments, is threatening to become a different kind of pandemic—it now afflicts very large and influential democracies that account for a quarter of the world's population.

The scholarly accounting of narratives involves careful reflexive practices between the stories told to social scientists and the decisions made about how to contextualize those stories showing a duty of care (Nesbitt-Larking 2022). At any one time, certain political narratives come to the fore, and this is evident in the selection of narratives that the authors have chosen.

> Some narratives become dominant in a specific context through processes of struggle over political meaning and selective appropriation of certain elements, while others are omitted because they are considered less appropriate. Experience-centered readings of narratives stress the significance of stories for expressing and building personal identity and agency. (Andrews et al. 2015, p. 141)

It is worth noting that narratives of everyday resistance to state authoritarianism can lead people to progressive acts against police brutality but, equally, to reactionary acts against vaccine mandates following the same broader narrative of resistance, where ordinary citizens coalesce against the actions of the state. Agency and political resistance may well take the form of protest, but as Ahmed notes, it can also take the more subtle form of a non-reproductive labour, "the labour of trying to intervene in the reproduction of a problem" (Ahmed 2021, p. 163). This allows political resistance to be about stopping something from continually being reproduced.

Contributions to This Special Issue—Complexity, Alternative Futures, and Business as Usual

This then brings us back to the theme of this Special Issue: what forms has political resistance taken during the coronavirus pandemic, and what impact has the global crisis had on political activism? The narratives of resistance, insights, and analysis brought together in the articles within this Special Issue can be understood along three broad themes; these relate to the complexity of political resistance; the possibilities of progressive alternative futures; and finally, the persistent reproduction of 'business as usual'.

The Complexity of Political Resistance

First, the very complexity and opaqueness of the emerging patterns of political resistance lend themselves to the methodology of a narrative analysis. A narrative analysis is attuned to the diversity and real-time adaptation of people's storied accounts of their present circumstances, along with evaluations of their pathways to the present and hopes for the future. In times of crisis and tension, when information is scarce and uncertainty prevails, narratives are in constant development, adaptation, and reformulation.

Such developments and the associated ontological insecurity are the bases of Kinnvall and Singh's exploration in this volume of the impact of disruptions and challenges caused by the global pandemic within the context of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. Kinnvall and Singh establish a contrast between the securitizing narratives of the Hindutva and the counter narratives of their opponents. Hindu nationalism essentializes the past and present and, in so doing, constructs an illusory pride, attachment, and desire. In a climate of uncertainty and doubt, ontological security secures subjectivity through the creation and recreation of securitizing desires and fantasies, characteristically associated with nation, religion, and gender. Interweaving anti-science, post-truth and anti-elite claims, Kinnvall and Singh argue that 'Hindu nationalists. . .invoked "ontological security" by appealing to the nostalgic greatness of ancient Indian science to cure modern diseases'.

The navigation of uncertainty and adaptation is further evident in Corinne Squire and Jamilson Bernardo De Lemos's account of the lives of people affected by HIV in the UK attempting to live through COVID-19 restrictions. As Squire and de Lemos say: 'They live with a condition whose medical, psychosocial and material complications escape unified description or theory and appear most intricately and fully in narratives'. People affected by HIV have double the chance of suffering from COVID-19 and experience a range of serious comorbidities. Squire and de Lemos's analysis sets out a range of tactics of resistance from calls for the restoration of economic rights, for support, and for food to the organization of alternative structures of social and psychological support.

Mastoureh Fathi's work on the complexity of home(s) and homing among migrants, such as the asylum seeker Touraj, illustrates how patterns of exile and migration have shaped and conditioned how a home is narrated in specific and detailed ways. The impact of COVID-19 has problematized the taken-for-granted treatment of homes as safe and comfortable spaces. Fathi expands upon this theme in her case study of Touraj's phenomenologies of home.

Alternative Futures within a Post-COVID-19 Polity

The pandemic has afforded many people the opportunity to step back from the everyday and to reflect on existing social and personal practices, to communicate with others on these matters, and to reformulate imaginatively how things might be done.

'Another world is better' has been a familiar progressive response to the disruptions and challenges of COVID-19. Jill Bradbury's article makes reference to what she calls 'tentative hopes that the global crisis might be a forceful impetus towards alternative forms of social life'. Balancing a realistic perspective on resilience and retreat with the possibilities for resistance, Bradbury's analyses are able to convey both that we are riding out the same storm and that we might be in different boats.

Kesi Mahendran, Anthony English, and Sue Nieland's (Forthcoming) study invites participants to rule the world using an interactive mapping tool; their dialogical analysis reveals that citizens express an ideal of a border-free world irrespective of whether they then chose to control or removed borders on the world. Yet, within this ideal, they show little understanding of what the reified term multilateralism means. When brought into dialogue with Antonio Guterres's United Nations speech 'multilateralism under fire' in the absence of a working definition of multilateralism, they anchor their response to Guterres within everyday narratives of cooperation and productivity. As the authors note, this lack of public understanding of multilateralism raises questions for global governance.

Ann Phoenix's analysis of both journalistic and academic writings on resistances to racism in the pandemic illustrates how the contradictions and conflicts unearthed by the pandemic have prompted new intertextual understandings and inspired new senses of hope in critical anti-racist interventions. These initiatives are achieved through the solidarities made possible through pandemic conditions. Quoting Meretoja, Phoenix says that anti-racist 'narratives enlarge the space of possibilities in which we can act, think, and re-imagine the world together with others and how they restrain or impoverish this space'. Against a backdrop of reactionary protests within Canada, McAuley and Nesbitt-Larking

consider the struggle for hegemony amongst competing progressive and reactionary narratives arising in response to the pandemic. Their analysis of the Canadian Periodicals Index database throughout the pandemic assesses the narratives of mainstream journalists and opinion leaders regarding expectations for the post-COVID-19 polity. Delineating between predictive and prescriptive narratives for the future, they foreground key themes of rationality and science, social equality, the role of the interventionist state, the local and the communitarian, and deep participation as predictive of a post-COVID-19 future in Canada. While the results are mixed, there is a marked preponderance of positive and progressive perspectives and very few reactionary or negative proposals or predictions.

The Reproduction of Business as Usual

Finally, after the virus settles and some version of normality becomes possible, a question arises: will life be a matter of business as usual? Will pre-existing regimes—authoritarian, populist, neoliberal, tyrannical, liberal democratic, and theocratic—continue to structure our existence? Will widespread inequality, poverty, discrimination, racism, gender-based violence, and other regime characteristics be challenged or changed?

This theme is investigated in Mark Davis's analysis of how both the UK and Australian states extend neoliberal governance in the individuated requirement that populations must now learn to 'live with the virus'. This approach reinforces pre-existing inequalities and employs the ideology of possessive individualism to conceal the ways in which the pandemic disproportionately affects those who have fewer resources and are oppressed.

Neoliberal ideology also underpins the article by Tereza Capelos, Ellen Nield, and Mikko Salmela on explanations of victimhood, frustration, and *ressentiment* among young Korean men. Capelos and her colleagues refer to the continuation of patterns of anti-globalization, misogyny, and neoliberal ideology that predate the COVID-19 pandemic. Ressentiment is an emotional construct in which there are experiences of victimhood, envy and injustice, a deep sense of destiny, and the feeling of powerlessness, transmuted into hatred, vindictiveness, and resentment. The crucial question, according to Capelos and her colleagues, is how enduring national narratives of meritocratic collectivism within Korea interplay and are resisted through a sense of new powerlessness related to recently arrived transnational narratives of competitive individualism.

Along with Bradbury, Phoenix, and Squire, Wendy Luttrell and her colleagues Mieasia Edwards and Jose Jiminez take the case of the focal point of the murder of George Floyd to examine how a strategic consensus can build amongst parents in schools. They use an innovative mixed-methods approach, which serves to bring out the importance of understanding intersectionalities in how the costs of COVID-19 are reinforced and amplified for racialized and stigmatized people. At the same time, by presenting narratives of those actually living through the pandemic, they also reveal opportunities, openings, and resistances. Through the exigencies and strictures of COVID-19, mediated through experiences of racism, African American New York parents have come to rethink their children's lives, and there have been many revelations. Luttrell and colleagues show how parents use narratives of resistance to form alliances to demand change.

Conclusions—Reconfiguring Political Protest

Together, the contributions to this Special Issue take different focal points and moments since 2020 to show how certain processes have become reconfigured by the pandemic. For example, the murder of George Floyd and the mainstreaming of the Black Lives Matter movement has built lasting alliances which resist the mechanisms of racial capitalism and its everyday expression in institutional racism and policy brutality. Equally, alongside opportunities for hope, we observe the extent to which the same mechanisms such as high-speed global communications and social movements, which create everyday political narratives to build consensus and progressive alliances, are also those which support reactionary anti-democratic alliance and unlikely coalitions. To some extent, elite narratives which

exhort us to learn 'to live with viruses' allow for business as usual. Equally anti-democratic actions since the pandemic began have reached new levels of political extremism.

Generalizing on the basis of the impact of something as complex and multifaceted as a global pandemic is a major challenge, and the range of potential developments and outcomes set out across the contributions to this volume are, therefore, appropriately diverse. The coexistence of other global forces and relations, including catastrophic climate change, deepening economic inequalities and inequities, the bellicosity of the Russian regime and Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and the growing sabre rattling of Xi and the Chinese regime, render any attempt to measure the precise impact of the pandemic extremely difficult. It would be futile to attempt to draw inferential links and to identify any isolatable, independent causes and effects. Along with the contributors to this volume, perhaps it is best to assess the current and emerging circumstances as those of an era of contention, struggle, and conflict between aspirations toward a more progressive and inclusive global order and the grim determination of certain organizations and regimes to counter such developments. For every rise in right-wing and authoritarian populism, there are counter forces, as seen, for instance, in the recent electoral defeats in the United States, Brazil, Slovenia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Systemic racism across police forces in the USA and beyond continues to target black people. At the same time, movements such as Black Lives Matter have become global and captured the imaginations of a generation that is mobilizing against racism and racialization. The advancements made by progressive forces in gender politics have also become globalized, as is evidenced in the spread of #MeToo awareness and the recent cross-national outpouring of support for the women of Iran. At the same time, the reactionary set of legislation and judicial decisions in the USA, Poland, and Russia, including bans on women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and progressive literature, is evidence that gender justice continues to be in question. Early impressions during the pandemic were that front-line, precarious, and remote workers deserved better support and improved working conditions. There is some evidence that this has been translated into better wages, a rebirth of union organization and collective consciousness, and an enhanced social status for routine workers. However, many governments appear to have dropped their promises of economic and other forms of compensation for key workers, and the global rise in interest rates to control inflation recalls the early 1980s when 'wrestling inflation to the ground' led to lay-offs, increasing unemployment and a consequent weakening of the working class.

It may simply be too soon to come to any consensus on what difference the pandemic made to global patterns of resistance and protest. Perhaps this will become clearer in a generation or two from now as the narrative threads developed during the pandemic are woven into the fabric of our changing global order.

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Article

Multilateralism under Fire: How Public Narratives of Multilateralism and Ideals of a Border-Free World Repudiate the Populist Re-Bordering Narrative

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Abstract: How do global multilateral arrangements such as the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO), vital to post-pandemic recovery, connect to the public understanding of multilateralism? The Citizen Worldview Mapping Project (CWMP) conducted in England, Scotland and Sweden examines how the degree of migration–mobility interacts with worldviews. CWMP asked participants (N = 24) to rule the world using an online interactive world mapping tool. Citizens were first interviewed on their migration–mobility, then invited to draw or remove borders on the world to manage human mobility. Citizens then engaged in a dialogue with António Guterres' 2018 address to the United Nations General Assembly on multilateralism. Dialogical analysis showed how, when empowered to rule the world, the majority of participants, irrespective of the degree of migration–mobility, expressed an ideal of a border-free world, even if they then went on to construct borders around the world. We understand this as a democratic dialogical ideal of a border-free world. Participants articulated rich narratives and social representations of international relations, yet did not have a formal understanding of the reified concept of multilateralism. Bridging this gap between the *consensual sphere* of the public's ideals based on social representations of cooperation and conflict and the *reified sphere* containing political narratives of multilateralism is a key step to longer-term post-pandemic recovery. A first step will be further studies into how an ideal of a border-free world can reconfigure political resistance to xenophobic populist re-bordering.

Keywords: multilateralism; migration; political narratives; dialogical self; European Union; one world; global identification

1. Introduction—New Nationalism and Populist Re-Bordering beyond COVID-19

It is an attractive starting point, within the context of this Special Issue's concerns with how the pandemic has reconfigured political resistance, to propose that the rupture of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has created emergent forms of governance rooted in cross-border solidarity, that state–civil–society arrangements acutely aware of our global interdependency changed towards new forms of togetherness. The UN, WHO and European Union all proposed such a grand narrative, that we are all in it together, appealing to states and citizens to act together through multilateralism (United Nations 2020). A risk with using the seemingly cohesive concept of 'togetherness' to harness certain civil behaviours from the public is the narrative that we are *all in it together* contains within it a self-reliant ideal of resilience (Müller and Tuitjert 2022; van Uden and van Houtum 2020). To this end, as political psychologists preoccupied with the dialogue between citizens and their governments, we propose an alternative departure point: that the capacity for cross-border solidarities and global-level cooperation was already emerging as a repudiation of widespread populist re-bordering. The field of decolonial and postcolonial studies offers valuable insight here on the focus of populist leaders' narratives and how they are imbued with nostalgia and nationalism (Campanella and Dassù 2019; Koegler et al.

2020). However, the political psychological focus of this paper is on the public themselves and how their sense of global solidarities resisted the active mobilisation of polarising narratives such as Protecting European Values (EU), Make America Great Again (US), Take Back Control (UK), Stop The Boats (UK) and *Folkhemmet* (People's Home[1], Sweden) These public narratives emerged to refuse, resist and counteract the polarising narratives integral to new nationalism. New nationalism has arisen as a concept to articulate the mainstreaming of radical right-wing parties into parliament coalitions platformed on law and order, anti-immigration policies and, often, anti-European Union sentiment (Eger and Valdez 2015; Korkut 2020; Bitonti et al. 2022). New nationalism builds on fantasy border narratives built around the myth of a homogeneous nation (Kinnvall and Singh 2022) and resists alternative futures (Krasteva 2020; Yerly 2022; McAuley and Nesbitt-Larking 2022).

Drawing on the Citizens Worldviews Mapping Project (conducted in 2019), we demonstrate that citizens, when invited to rule the world within an online interactive worldview mapping task, express before the coronavirus pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine an ideal of a border-free world and articulate narratives of togetherness and global interdependencies. Exploring the dimensions of these narratives provides the potential to understand the solidarities citizens freely express when discussing human migration and mobility, the potential to understand how citizens would configure the global order when they are engaged in world-making (Power et al. 2023) and the potential to understand everyday resistance to *business as usual* and other post-pandemic hegemonic narratives (Andrews et al. 2023).

The dialogical narrative analysis (Bakhtin 2010; Marková 2003; Fathi 2013; Mahendran et al. 2022; Mahendran et al. 2023) below works with three individual cases to ask one central question: *How does the ideal of a border-free world connect to the public's articulation of multilateralism*? In order to examine this question, the analysis interrelates two parts of the Citizen Worldview Mapping Project (CWMP): first, how citizens mapped the world and the democratic dialogical ideals they expressed when doing this, and second, how they responded to António Guterres' statement in his 2018 speech, that multilateralism was under fire.

Central to the theory of social representations is Moscovici's delineation between the reified universe and the consensual universe. The reified universe of science creates seemingly ahistorical, objectified scientific knowledge, and the consensual universes of common sense meanings involves a thinking public elaborating on unfamiliar concepts, objectifying them and anchoring them to other, familiar knowledge (Moscovici 1984; Moscovici 1988; Howarth 2006; Mahendran 2018; Mahendran et al. 2022). This articulation is sustained through intersubjective negotiation (Gillespie and Cornish 2010). One striking finding of CWMP is that none of the participants understood the formal or reified term *multilateralism.* Multilateralism, as we demonstrate below, is a concept that needs to be translated and anchored into people's common sense worlds. Public understanding of the ideals of actors such as the UN therefore requires a bridge between multilateralism's formal articulation within global governance and what other concepts the public connect multilateralism to in order to make sense of it. Exploring the public's worldviews on the global order, nationalism and transnationalism are the very foundational piers to this bridge. The abutment to the bridge, we propose, is their ideal of a bordered or a border-free world.

Using the concept of worldviews implies perspective or conception of the world, and it is important throughout to consider the extent to which consciousness has shifted toward a more planetary consciousness (Chakrabarty 2019). A challenge for social and political psychology is that, given the extent of our global interdependencies, scientists need to go beyond psychology's long-standing preoccupation with worldviews or worldmaking and instead consider post-human/more-than–human planetary consciousness (Chakrabarty 2019; Haraway 2016; Mahendran et al. 2022). We have designed methods and tools to support citizens in articulating *planet views* that recognise the climate emergency. The study presented below offers an analysis of new psychologies of multilateralism and international relations, which recognises the role of national sovereignties in tackling the climate emergency. The remainder of the introduction develops the necessary bridge by

exploring three components: (i) reified articulations of multilateralism, (ii) the existing literature on the public's understanding of multilateralism and (iii) studies into global human identification and citizenship.

2. Multilateralism and António Guterres' Addresses to the UN

Multilateralism—the collective consideration of global matters by world nations—is a relatively new concept connected to post-war arrangements around 1919 (Alhashimi et al. 2021). Multilateralism, in its present form, is generally considered to have emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and diminished League of Nations (Schlesinger 2003). The broad purpose of multilateralism is to institutionalise intergovernmental cooperation and achieve common goals, typically within organisations such as the United Nations or G20 (Langenhove 2010). One of the more commonly used traditional definitions is Keohane's (1988) assertion that multilateral agreements are optional endeavours which offer a 'persistent sets of rules that constrain activity, shape expectations and prescribe roles' (Keohane 1988, p. x). More recent thinking on multilateralism highlights the ever-growing necessary, rather than optional, status of multilateral cooperation, given the growing importance of global public policy on climate-based threats (Kaul 2020).

In 2021, as the world was engaged in cross-border cooperation to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, António Guterres closed his annual address to the United Nations proposing:

> The best way to advance the interests of one's own citizens is by advancing the interests of our common future. Interdependence is the logic of the 21st century. And it is the lodestar of the United Nations. This is our time. A moment for transformation. An era to re-ignite multilateralism. An age of possibilities. Let us restore trust. Let us inspire hope. Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations. (António Guterres, September 2021)

At the time of designing the CWMP in 2018, just over a year before the COVID-19 pandemic, within the context of rising populism, polarisation, antipolitics and antidemocracy, António Guterres had used his address to emphasise the extent to which multilateralism was under fire. He stated:

> The world is more connected, yet societies are becoming more fragmented. Challenges are growing outward, while many people are turning inward. Multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most. Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations. (António Guterres, September 2018)

In his September 2022 UN address, Guterres did not go further into how we might 're-ignite multilateralism', but the connotations around the expression multilateralism under fire radically altered. Russia's invasion in February 2022 of Ukraine led to a radical alteration across Europe of the country's relationship with NATO and the European Union. Ukraine sought to fast-track its acceptance into the EU. Equally, both Finland and Sweden took steps to join NATO. Guterres took the Black Sea Grain Initiative as an example of 'multilateral diplomacy in action', as Türkiye, Russia and Ukraine agreed to a grain arrangement. His rallying cry at the end of his speech foregrounded such cooperation and dialogue:

> At one stage, international relations seemed to be moving toward a G-2 world; now we risk ending up with G-nothing. No cooperation. No dialogue. No collective problem solving. But the reality is that we live in a world where the logic of cooperation and dialogue is the only path forward. No power or group alone can call the shots. No major global challenge can be solved by a coalition of the willing. We need a coalition of the world. Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations. (António Guterres, September 2022)

If supranational organisations such as the European Union, NATO and the UN rely within liberal democracies on a public mandate (they rely on public assent to multilateralism) how does this continue without public dialogue and public understanding of multilateralism? Surveys show that, when asked about trust in governments, citizens tend to have high levels of trust in the United Nations (Eurobarometer), higher than their trust

in their national governments. Therefore, a lack of recognition of the concept of multilateralism itself should not be taken as a lack of recognition of the role of the United Nations.

3. Public Understanding and Attitudes towards Multilateralism

We found no literature on the public's understanding of multilateralism or the public's views on global governance. Questions related to global governance are not asked within social attitude surveys or within psychological studies. Yet, as this article argues, the understanding of institutions such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, World Bank and the core concept of multilateralism are key to post-pandemic recovery and cross-border cooperation. Scholarly examinations into multilateralism have tended to concentrate on state-level analyses of multilateralism within the context of post-Cold War polarity debates and the ongoing role of global governance and international relations arrangements, such as the UN and NATO.

Examining attitudes towards multilateralism and how this relates to the public understanding of international relations could be insightful for a better interpretation of public responses to new nationalism and populist re-bordering. Whilst the British Social Attitudes Survey has a variety of data on national identity and the UK's EU relationship (British Social Attitudes Survey 2022), there are no questions relating to multilateralism or its related organisations (e.g., the UN). Equally, the survey data on public attitudes across various European countries, such as Eurobarometer, European Quality of Life Surveys and European Social Survey, does not measure public attitudes towards multilateralism.

4. Global Identification and Citizenship

Perhaps the closest line of inquiry is to be found within social and political psychology with the growing interest in global identification and citizenship (GHIC) (McFarland et al. 2019; Mahendran et al. 2023). Of importance to gauging public understanding of multilateralism is psychology's existing long-standing interest in global consciousness. Sampson and Smith in the 1950s gauged the extent of people's agreement with the statement 'it would be better to be a citizen of the world than of any particular country' within their Worldmindedness Scale (Sampson and Smith 1957; McFarland et al. 2019; Mahendran et al. 2022). A landmark departure point in this field is Sam McFarland's essay 'The slow creation of Humanity' (McFarland 2011). Within political psychology, different terms have been favoured, e.g., identification with all humanity (IWAH-McFarland 2011; McFarland et al. 2012), global citizenship identification (Reysen and Katzarska-Miller 2013), the global social identity scale (Reese et al. 2014) and psychological sense of global community (Hackett et al. 2015). When reviewing this line of inquiry, McFarland proposed the term global human identification and citizenship (GHIC) (McFarland et al. 2019). However, whilst various GHIC scales ask questions on global identification, they do not ask citizens to talk about global orders, cooperation or, crucially, the concept of multilateralism.

Psychologist Fathali Moghaddam (2020) argue that psychologists have a substantial role in achieving democracy across borders by understanding democratic citizenship at the level of the individual. Moghaddam proposes that, to strengthen multilateralism, psychology should focus on 'omniculturalism'. Indeed, he argues that an educational policy based on this concept would focus on emphasising human commonalities rather than exacerbating national or group differences (Moghaddam 2012). In essence, he concludes, a universal category of 'human being' allows all to adopt this as a superordinate identity and, thus, move beyond intergroup conflict. Bilewicz and Bilewicz (2012) argue that defining universal human traits in the first instance is a problematic concept that is unlikely to be perceived as legitimate by all groups. Moreover, research on superordinate identities within the context of national identities often has limitations regarding intergroup projections (Kessler et al. 2010). That is to say, any higher-level social categories are defined by the public's knowledge of their own subgroups (Wenzel et al. 2008). Therefore, any universal definition of humanity is unlikely to align with this assumed knowledge due to the disparate nature of group membership.

Another line of enquiry within psychology literature in the context of public understanding of multilateralism is as an explanatory tool for why US policymakers opt for multilateral solutions in response to international security threats (Neack 2013). For example, Rathburn's (2012) proposal that social psychology research on generalised trust offers a paradigm for understanding that cooperation follows trust, rather than vice versa. An issue here is that focusing on either superordinate identities or generalised trust does not offer any insight into the public's engagement with the concept of multilateralism. Indeed, there seems to be a vacuum in the social scientific literature on the public's narratives or understanding of multilateral cooperation; specifically, the tension between a desire for security and sovereignty (i.e., the endorsement of borders) alongside a wish to participate in global cooperation beyond the limitations of borders.

As we have argued (Mahendran et al. 2023), a difficulty with studies into global identification is that, across the different measures, respondents showing global identification remains strikingly low. There have been some attempts to use the climate emergency to increase it, but these have had limited success. We propose that this is because such measures tend not to grapple sufficiently with migration–mobility and precarity. Precarity is a key concept for social psychology (Coultas et al. 2023; Fine 2023; Mahendran et al. 2023), and within the design of the study presented below, we measured participants' degree of migration–mobility using the Migration–Mobility Continuum (Mahendran 2013).

5. The Present Study—Dialogical Citizens

Citizens who are navigating and making sense of an increasingly politically turbulent world often draw upon stories and narratives that are prevalent in society, for example, associated with conflict, change, gender, culture and security (Andrews et al. 2015; Hammack and Pilecki 2012; Nesbitt-Larking 2022). These stories relate to the predominant social representations that come and go throughout life and are often reflected and seized upon when citizens are brought into dialogue with the political world they inhabit (Mahendran et al. 2015; Zittoun 2017).

These can be contemporary or historical, so they may be part of an autobiography that reflects the past and the present and are reflected by reference to sociopolitical events, as well as personal events. They are likely to reflect changing political social representations that run alongside a person's story and become explicit in narratives that focus upon salient social and political events, for example, responses to the UK's decision to leave the EU and Brexit (Mahendran 2018; O'Dwyer 2020), to immigration (de Rosa et al. 2021) or to the US political division between left and right (Hanson et al. 2021). They emerge when researchers bring their participants into dialogue with the predominant political narratives that influence contemporary thinking; otherwise, they may be unrecognised and subsumed into the view of narratives as only autobiographical.

The present study facilitates the articulation of political narratives by bringing participants into dialogue within macro-level narratives, using stimulus materials such as films, speeches, images and governance policy statement on vexed issues. This design allows participants to reflect in their narrative how these questions are, and can be, addressed and answered within the key available social representations. Using the four-step analysis below, it is possible to explore one world narratives (Mahendran 2017), narratives of bordering and its relationship to precarity (Mahendran et al. 2023), de-polarisation through sustaining dialogue (English and Mahendran 2021) and resistance to nostalgia rhetoric (Nieland et al. 2022). These materials, alongside the Migration–Mobility Continuum (MMC; Mahendran 2013), allow us to reveal the relationship between the understanding and appreciation of multilateralism and parameters of human mobility.

6. Methodology

The present study combines two methods: face-to-face interviews and an online interactive worldview mapping tool (IWMT), which was developed by interactive media developers Ryan Hayle and Kesi Mahendran. Social scientists have made considerable use of maps in order to access worldviews (Futch and Fine 2013; see Fine 2023 for US children's maps of their school environments). In our design, rather than explore psychosocial mapping and sense-making, participants are brought into direct dialogue with images of the Earth and then stimulus materials such as factual questions and political speeches on international relations, as outlined above. This dialogical design draws upon Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical self and social representations (Mahendran et al. 2022, 2023) to understand how participants co-author key political concepts such as multilateralism. Participants can be understood as taking up the *I-citizen position*. This citizen position (Mahendran et al. 2015) arises out of an Arendtian notion of 'enlarged mentality' (Arendt 1961), where participants think beyond their immediate interests—they think cooperatively (see also Dewey [1927] 1954 on public capacity).

Within deliberation studies, there is some debate as to how and particularly *where* citizens articulate their interests in terms of rational speech and using formalised political discourse. Seyla Benhabib, in defending Arendt from critique by the feminist such as Adrienne Riche, that Arendt took a masculinist view of public dialogue and drew on Arendt's study of Rahel Varnhagen. This explores the salon space as a space for playful, risky talk often avant-garde and quite distinct from the formalised political discourse (Benhabib 1995). The disinhibitions of salon talk could be the key to truly understanding citizens as dialogical citizens in the context of social media and its potential.

6.1. Sampling Participants and Our Positionality

Fieldwork was conducted in 2019 in Edinburgh (N = 10), Stockholm (N = 10) and Manchester (N = 3). The Manchester component was halted in February 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study involved 11 males and 12 females, and the ages ranged from 19 to 69 years old (M = 41.18). The mean age was altered slightly between cities as follows: Edinburgh, M = 46.33; Manchester, also M = 46.33; and Stockholm, M = 35. Quota sampling across the degree of migration–mobility (blinded/see above) was used involving an initial discussion to establish their degree of personal migration–mobility. Adverts on online neighbourhood sites and a notice at Stockholm University were the key two steps to create the sample, followed by chain sampling. Participants came from professional, skilled and semi-skilled occupations. There were two academics, three students and no unemployed people in the sample. Both the interviewers are British, the first author (MMC2) has parents who were migrants from Sri Lanka. She conducted a set of interviews at all three locations. The second interviewer (MMC4) worked only in Scotland. She moved from England to Scotland, having spent a year working elsewhere in Europe. The extracts below are presented as dialogue to support further reflexive reading of the analysis presented.

6.2. Procedure

Interview: The semi-structured interviews were on, average, 35 min long. The interviews opened with sentence completion questions: 'The world is. . .', 'I am a part of. . .' and I vote/don't vote because. . .'. Participants then answered questions on citizenship, including the question 'Do you consider yourself a citizen of the European Union?'. In the next section of the interview, participants answered six questions that enabled the authors to place them within one of the ten positions within the Migration-Mobility Continuum (see Figure 1). These six questions asked about the moves the participant had made, whether they had moved and returned to the country of the interview, whether they had ever planned to move, whether they felt on the outside and, finally, whether they were settled or would move again/for the first time (Mahendran 2017).
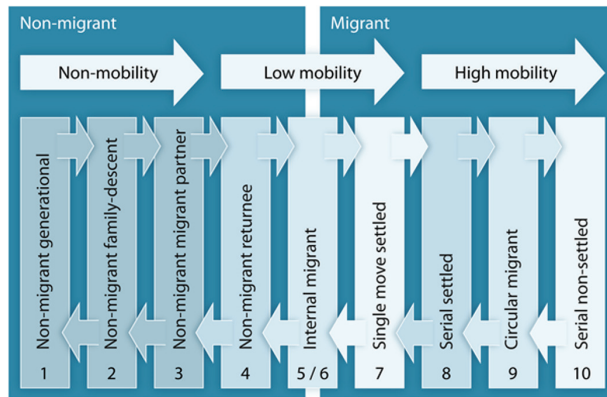
Figure 1. The 10-point Migration–Mobility Continuum (Mahendran 2013, 2017).

Interactive Worldview Mapping Tool (IWMT): The duration of the mapping was 60 min on average. This included a break between the interview and IWMT mapping. The total session for the study as a whole was 90 min mean average (range 78–108 min). The Interactive Worldview Mapping Tool (IWMT) involved four sections. Section 1 involved participants responding to three open questions and the same six MMC questions they had answered in the interview. These were now presented as closed drop-down options, in order to explore the losses and gains of quantification in future studies. In Section 2, participants could choose between two map options (Figure 2). Participants were invited to choose which they preferred and were told that they now had the power to *rule the world*. Both maps are based on the widely used but contested Google Earth's Spherical Normal (equatorial) variant of the Mercator projection. Participants then saw the statement:

Draw lines around the parts of the world that you feel require state lines. Each time you draw a line on the map-this represents a boundary where people travelling across the boundary would need to show their passport to enter/or be attempting to claim asylum.
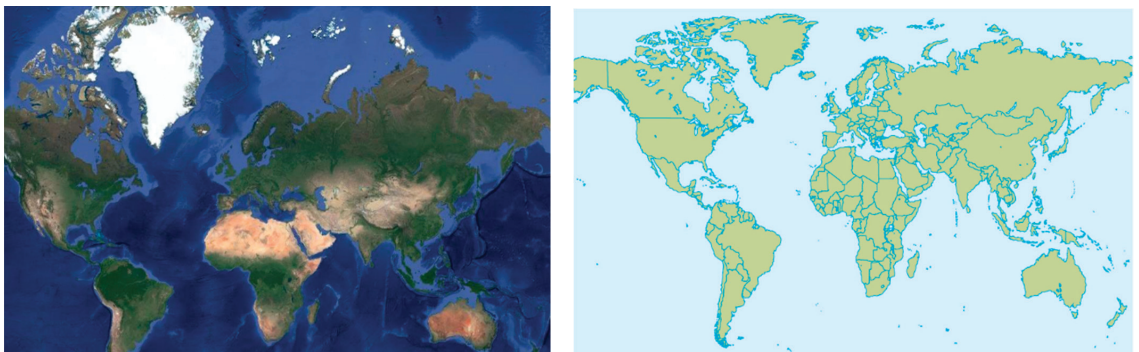
Figure 2. Two options: border-free Earth map and nation state borders world map.

Participants were given as much time as they required to complete and could switch maps. Section 3 involved participants answering ten international relations questions. Eight were closed-response factual questions, e.g., 'Indicate which countries began the European Economic Community in 1951, click on the list which accurately shows the ten wealthiest countries (nominal GDP); click on the countries which were part of the Swedish/British Empire at its height in 1648/1922'. Participants then saw the correct answer. However, the final two questions were not factual but attitudinal questions assessing their agreement with two statements. Statement 1 was taken from Jean Claude

Juncker's (President, European Commission) State of the Union address. This began 'I want Europe to get off the side-lines of world affairs'. Statement 2 directly refer to the title of the article *Multilateralism under fire* by António Guterres (Secretary General United Nations), as set out above. Finally, in Section 4, participants were given a second opportunity to re-draw their worldview map. The hypothesis here was that, after being confronted with the parameters of their international relations knowledge, they might moderate their actions when ruling the world.

6.3. Analytical Steps

Both the interview and mapping were conducted in English, this was then transcribed and built into a database using NVivo 12 by the second author. Within the approach, we have developed within the Public Dialogue Psychology Collaboratory (PDPC), the analysis moves iteratively between four steps (Mahendran et al. 2022). When conducting the dialogical analysis of the maps and the recorded interviews with the MMC position, it became evident that participants were working with an ideal of a border-free world. This related to differing sense-making on issues of control and sovereignty, as well as distinct social representations about human agency and the potential role of borders (Mahendran et al. 2023). In the third step, using NVivo 12, we analysed all the responses to Statement 2 made by Guterres. This was understood by the authors using three underlying social representations about how the world is organised as conflict-based, competitive or collaborative/cooperative (Staerklé et al. 2011; Mahendran et al. 2023). In the fourth step, key I-positions within the dialogical self were identified within the transcribed interview dialogue. In the analysis presented below, we focus on three cases where there are low levels of migration–mobility and the participants use their national identity to examine transnationalism and then multilateralism. Though not articulated here, minor transnationalism appears key to bridging the gap between reified and consensual understandings of multilateralism.

7. Dialogical Analysis

It is important to keep in mind the timing of the fieldwork (2019) occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion into Ukraine. Multilateralism under fire takes on a new meaning within this context, and the decision by both Sweden and Finland to apply for membership to NATO may well create new narratives amongst the public on questions of multilateralism. As discussed above, in order to reveal the features of the public's understanding of multilateralism, the contribution we make within this article is to relate this to an ideal of a border-free world and the decision to control and remove borders. The three cases selected are presented as a dialogue between the citizen and the first author. They are presented in the following order, which relates directly to the procedure of the study. First, the participants' decision to control/remove borders on the world, then their response to the Guterres' address, followed by their decision to control/remove borders.

Each case shows how participants use their hyperagentic position differently. In Cases one and three, agency is about making careful decisions on how to border the world. The second case agency reveals processes of indecision. Our focus here is not on whether or not participants control/remove borders but rather on how participants articulate the ideal of a border-free world and how this relates to multilateralism.

7.1. Case 1: YD—Stockholm

In the first case, YD articulates an ideal of a border-free world before receiving any stimulus material. He works with the border-free Google Earth map. Whilst he could work with a state-bordered world, he chooses to define where supranational borders should be, relating to cooperation between certain regions. YD is one of the youngest participants, a solider aged 20, who has never moved from Sweden and who describes himself as 'fully settled' (MMC1). He moves between a series of I-positions. Within YD's ideals of no borders, the concept of the 'Earth' is used. He does not refer to the world, planet or globe; instead, the Earth is figured as containing 'united states' all working

cooperatively together. When referring to 'states', it is important to note that 'borderless' means working across borders rather than borders not existing. Within this narrative, state entities work together to advance beyond the parameters of the Earth, 'going to space'; this is understood as productive. JD's understanding of international relations is a so-called realist one: states killing each other, which builds on an antinomy of productive/destructive social representation.

7.1.1. Extract 1—United States of Earth

First Author: Which is the world that you, you see, you know, the, the one that you would see the world as, you know, being like or how you would like it to be.

YD: How I would like it, want it to be? Uh-huh. Ideally, I'd like, like, um, United States of Earth kind of thing. Instead of, instead of killing each other, we can actually do productive stuff like, I don't know, going to space or something. So I'd like to see this world map, ah, the borderless world one, but most realistically is another question. (YD, Interview, MMC1, Stockholm).

YD, in his statement within the IWMT (Extract 2), introduces an I-worker position, to imagine economic migrants moving across the world. This social representation of the world divides it along what might be understood as *international developmental* lines, and the expression 'moves up' evokes a representation of a global north/south divide. Finally, having introduced the idea of conflictual cultures, YD makes the decision to include Russia to create cooperative diplomatic international relations. YD spent around 10 min creating his borders, and Figure 2 shows the care taken around where to place the lines in his final map.

7.1.2. Extract 2—The Distribution of Wealth

YD: I thought about distribution of wealth and the expected flow of population. I put the EU and Russia in the same box since all of them are wealthy and well-developed countries, and within the EU the ideals are somewhat similar. I included Russia to minimize hostility between the regions. I then boxed Africa and the way I see it EU would be responsible for economic stimulation of Africa. Developing infrastructure in Africa as well as helping establish working democratic governments. After that I made the same argument with USA/Canada and Latin America. Oceania is one region due to the shared island property as well as the economic power and well-developed status of Japan and Australia would allow them to stimulate the other countries in their region.

China/far east region was the most difficult due to China's very particular culture compared to the other countries in the region, but I think the economic power of China and India would allow them to be responsible for development of the other countries in the region. The Oceanian region could support economically as well (YD MMC1-IWMT Statement)

Within this statement, YD explains that the ideals between the EU and Russia are 'somewhat similar', which points to a 2019 pre-Ukraine context, though this overlooks the Annexation of Crimea that occurred in 2014. YD, placing both within the same zone, minimises hostility. The EU (a geopolitical entity) is placed in the position of being 'responsible' for Africa. Africa, strikingly, is not understood as a geopolitical entity or a set of heterogeneous countries, despite the existence of the African Union and trans-African initiatives. Africa is represented in deficit (lacking infrastructure and democracy as an entire region), and the same colonial arrangements are set up with the USA/Canada and Latin America. The social representational understanding of international relations is that there are economically powerful countries who will be responsible for the other countries. In Extract 3, YD dialogues with Guterres' statement by returning to his opening statement (Extract 1).

7.1.3. Extract 3—We're Cooperating Less

First Author: this time it is the United Nations. So, he said a slightly smaller statement. The world is more connected, yet societies are becoming more fragmented. Challenges are growing outward, while many people are turning inward. Multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most. So, multilateralism in the sense of countries working together (YD: Mm-hmm) What do you think of that statement?

YD: I have to agree because, um, like I said in my, in my opening, actually the first 10 min, uh, I don't like how, uh, nationalism is growing stronger in different countries (First author: Yeah) We're cooperating less and less. Uh, it's becoming more important for like nationalistic parliaments are winning around in all countries.

First Author: Yeah. Yes, yes, you started on that note, didn't you? Yeah. Yeah, it's true. So, what do you want to write in then?

YD: Okay, I agree the world is becoming more fragmented. Nationalism is on the rise everywhere, and cooperation is decreasing. The threat of war is increasing. Countries are increasing their defense budgets.

YD when given the opportunity to revise his map after responding to the set of IR questions explains 'I think the borderless one's more fun to look at'. He adds that he is 'fairly satisfied' with his original mapping (Figure 3 and does not alter it (YD, Interview, MMC1, Stockholm).

YD's understanding of multilateralism is based on cooperation—if we, as nations, cooperate, we would not need to increase defence budgets. Yet, returning to the neocolonial context, we have connected to rising new nationalism, and the basis of cooperation is organised around hierarchies of leader-developed countries and follower-developing countries. Here, multilateralism is related to economic productivity and exploration. Multilateralism becomes the basis of the exploitation of resources. Therefore, whilst YD may be pro-multilateralism in a potential social attitudes question within a survey, the qualitative narratives around 'alliance' that inform this decision are key. YD's worldview can be contrasted with the second case: PR. PR selects the Google Earth border-free world. However, he makes the decision not to place any borders on the Earth at all (Figure 4).
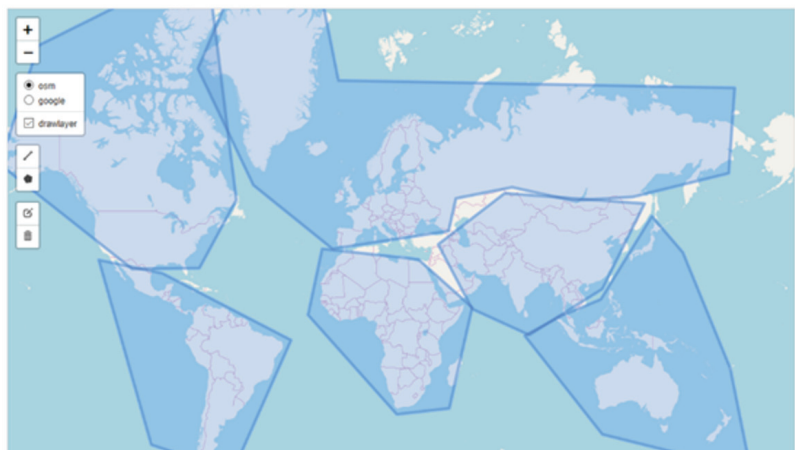
Figure 3. YD creates a world with regional borders.

Figure 4. PR-preferred map.

7.2. Case 2 PR—Edinburgh—Border-Free World

7.2.1. Extract 4—It Is Not for Me to Place Barriers between People

First Author: So, if you ruled the world PR how would you border the world?

PR: I suppose (.) I wouldn't, or if I did, I wouldn't presume I wouldn't be able to do it (.) I can't make that choice, sorry there is no way I can put a line across anybody, it is not for me to say, it's just not for me to say, so (.) (First author: Tell me a bit about that) Erm (.) so fundamentally I don't think there is any difference between people living in Amsterdam or Manchester, they speak a different language so I'd either say the countries as they are is fine, basically that's fine, countries as they are, its fine, it's come through a historical process, that's fine, I'm not going to disagree with it people are largely happy with those things, but I couldn't, I couldn't (pause) I'd find it upsetting to think I'd be stopping people moving from one place to another, I couldn't do it.

First author: So, would you keep the world like that, or would you keep it like the state bordered one?

PR: (several seconds pause). I'd refuse to have any agency in that decision making, on my own, fundamentally, there is no, there is no, any ideal in my head, but I wouldn't want to be responsible. So let's assume I am the king of the world or president of the world and we say it would be useful to have some sort of control and there was really good reasons for that and I accepted that, those sorts of checks or controls, the process to finding what they ought to be, would not be my agency it would have to be decided by something else by the people who live there. For good reasons so erm (.) yeah, who am I to say who could live here or can't live here, it is for us to say, do you know what I mean, but it's not for me to say (PR, Interview, MMC5, Edinburgh).

PR foregrounds his 'individual agency' as not being enough to make the decision on whether or where borders should be placed. Yet, barriers are understood as existing potentially for 'good reasons'. PR's no bordering position is not an ideal for border-free worlds; rather, it translates borders into 'barriers' and understands the world as being populated by people. Within the statement PR writes within the IWMT, he encapsulates his I-position around individual agency.

> **PR:** I drew no lines because, it is not for me to place barriers between people. Those barriers may exist, and for good reason, but my individual agency should not be the determining factor (PR, IWMT statement, MMC5, Edinburgh).

This is quite distinct from YD, who takes up the position of the state actor. PR's response to Guterres' statement further develops his understanding of multilateralism and how this relates to decisions to control/remove borders on the world.

7.2.2. Extract 5—I Would rather a Word like Cooperation

> **First author:** So, this is Guterres now. "The world is more connected. Yet societies are becoming more fragmented. Challenges are growing outward while many people are turning inwards. Multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most." What do you think about that statement?

> **PR:** It probably lies with who we are (…) I think you could maybe particularly that France is more fragmented than it was 50 years ago. Do you know what I mean? (First Author: Yeah) The normal way of understanding what it was like to be (…) on the other side of the world, that's not quite true, they did have a little bit more (…) But yeah generally, a sentiment I agree with. I wouldn't use the word multilateralism but.

> **First Author:** You say you wouldn't use the word multilateralism, tell me a little bit about why you wouldn't use that term.

> **PR:** Um. Probably aesthetic reasons actually. I would rather a word like cooperation, or … so the reason I don't like that I guess is because that's talking at state access as if they're completely different to people (First Author: State access as if they're completely different to people). Yeah, so the relationship between States, and it is, it is different, and I, I'm not going to argue that they're not, but you start using words like that that have absolutely no basis on people's lives. It sounds like a foreign, it sounds foreign, I think it sounds, it's a foreign word for dealing with foreigners. Whereas if you say, actually, looking after each other is how we come into common solutions, working together. It's words, common words that people understand that relate to how they work in their gardens or volunteer at a bowling club, that works. And it's the same, it's the same underlying idea that working together allows you to create stuff, outcomes that you might like that you can't achieve on your own, you can't have bowling games on your own, it doesn't work (PR, Interview, MMC5, Edinburgh).

PR takes up an advisory position between the state actor and the people saying 'if you start using words like that, the concept is not going to be understood'. He proposes that it is not a question of the idea of cooperation or alliance; rather, it is about people's lived realities. PR proposes a more social relational public narrative of multilateralism, which privileges 'looking after each other' and 'common solutions'. The image of citizens bowling evokes the idea of Bowling Alone, possibly a reference to Putman's statements on social capital. Again, like YD, working together is about 'creating stuff', i.e., productivity, rather than peace. Citizens here are figured or portrayed as being at home, at leisure bowling, which limits the scope of their political agency. They are not portrayed as at work or engaged in sociopolitical activities, e.g., voting. In his statement within the IWMT, he points to Guterres' conflation between people and governments.

7.2.3. Extract 6—Guterres Equates People with Governments

> **PR:** I agree that the co-operation between states to meet challenges is key. I think Guterres over-estimates the level of outward looking societies previously. There has perhaps been a growth of populism since 2008, but whether there has been a fundamental change in people's attitudes is unclear. He seems to equate people with the governments and discourse in their countries (PR, MMC5, IWMT Statement in response to Guterres' statement).

Central to PR's understanding of multilateralism is the idea that, as long as it is about governments and states, people are not going to identify with it. Here, the demos are presented as apolitical and not identified with nations, countries or speaking on behalf of their countries. Within the final case, OU in Stockholm chooses the state-bordered map (Figure 5), dividing the world into 'good' and 'bad' countries. She explains her rationale and reveals a public narrative of multilateralism around the push and pull factors of people moving from 'bad' to 'good' countries.

Figure 5. OU's preferred map.

7.3. Case 3—OU—Stockholm

7.3.1. Extract 7—The World Isn't a Perfect Place

OU: Because the world isn't a perfect place, and a lot of countries don't take care of their citizens, so people feel the need to flee. Instead the countries should take care of their people, so they don't feel the need to flee. If we didn't have borders, then everyone obviously would like to live in the best countries, like Sweden, which has great social security systems. If everyone came here, then Sweden would be destroyed, so to speak. It's really hard, even now, to find a job and a place to live, for people who already live here. we need to make it better for our own people first, before we can help others (OU, MMC4 Statement on IWMT on mapping).

OU creates a state-bordered world that contains people on the move, people fleeing. She uses the term flee and equally talks of Sweden as being 'destroyed'. Her use of 'we' is about Swedish people who need to be placed first. The movement of people across the world is understood entirely in terms of refugee-related movement rather than economic movement, travel or tourism. It is important to note that, like the other participants, OU was not familiar with the term multilateralism and immediately asked what it meant.

7.3.2. Extract 8—Multilateralism as Fleeing People in a Connected World

First author: And then we're going to go a little bit bigger now. So, the same time, i.e., September 2018, now this is Guterres.

OU: What is multilateralism?

First author: Countries working together.

OU: Oh, okay. Thank you. Yeah. I guess one of the problems of the world being more connected is that you know a lot of people, moving around fleeing their countries and in that way creating problems in the so-called better countries. Again, Sweden is the example from here. It used to be a safe country, safer. Now, because of the high immigration, there is a lot more violence. It's a lot more insecure. So, I'm not saying it would have been perfect if we didn't allow immigration. Obviously, there are bad people within you know bad Swedish

people too disregarding ethnicity because you can still be Swedish even if you're not ethnically Swedish. It depends on how you feel, were you born here, grew up here, maybe you're born in another country but you grew up here, et cetera you know and there's many different ways. Um. And obviously, if people from another country move into your country, these foreigners have completely different values than what you're used, there's going to be a problem (OU, Interview, MMC4, Stockholm).

Within Extract 8, there is an important delineation between ethnic nationalism and nationalism, and OU relates this to the values of the country. Sweden is positioned as a good, safe country, but importantly, and in line with populist re-bordering narratives, this is placed in the past tense.

7.3.3. Extract 9—We Do Not Want These People in Our Country

First Author: So, how do you respond to Guterres?

OU: The problem now since the world is more connected, yeah, there's internet and all that and there are so many cheap flights to travel around so people travel more. People have more contact with people abroad. So, I guess people know, people are more conscious about other cultures. (First author: yeah) And have stronger opinions about other cultures. So how do you say? So, it's understandable that while the world is sort of expanding and becoming more connected, there will be more nationalism involved because people see more clearly that that country is not good. We do not want those people in our country become racist, nationalistic. It's understandable. I'm not saying it's acceptable but it's understandable. And, and yeah, and there's the multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most. I can agree there because we should be helping each other. We should be helping these countries that have problems to become better so to speak so that their people will not want to leave but instead people become very, how do you say? Hostile not wanting, wanting to shut these people out instead. Like we don't want them in our country. Yeah, okay, so if we don't want them there how can we help them? But then again, we need to help our own country first before we can help others so back to that point. Ah, I don't know if that's a good answer for the question there. It's hard (OU, Interview, MMC4, Stockholm).

OU points to the dilemmatic nature of multilateral cooperation when discussing refugee-related migration. Using a feature of the dialogical self, she takes up and co-authors the voice of a xenophobic nationalist: 'We do not want these people in our country'. She simultaneously distances herself from this view but also advocates for it. OU's response challenges us/them accounts of the psychological processes involved in populist re-bordering; her narrative of multilateralism remains continually in a dialogue with xenophobic nationalism (Mahendran 2018).

7.3.4. Extract 10—Hate Grows in a Small, Connected World

OU: I can agree, since as the world is becoming more connected and smaller, so to speak, people travel more, move more, people all over the world become more conscious about other cultures. This creates sort of problems, since they will then see clearer than before, the differences between each other, and from that more hate grows. Instead of wanting to help poorer, more underdeveloped countries, we want to shut them out, refusing to let them in to our countries, since they will create problems in our home (OU, MMC4, statement to Guterres on IWMT).

For OU, within her fearful narrative, the world becoming smaller, more connected, is not the basis of solidarity; rather, it creates an ease with which people can connect and 'see differences'. Yet, as we found across the 23 interviews, alongside these fears exists an alternative version of the world—a more ideal world. There is both love and hate within OU's narratives and positioning on bordering and multilateralism.

7.3.5. Extract 11—In an Ideal World We Would Move for Good Reasons: Love

First author: Do you want to change your choices? You can, reconsider anything. . .

OU: Which world would I like to have?

First Author: Yeah, which one, which is the one that you would work with?

OU: I mean to start mapping. It's easy to see here, the one here.

First Author: Yeah, so you'd stick with the bordered world?

OU: Yeah (First Author: Safe borders?) It's easy to see. (Chuckles) I mean I like the one without borders better. It's nicer. It looks nicer. It's natural but it's easier to see to here from the connecting countries.

First Author: Which is the world you would like to live in? (explains option to re-border map or choose different map a second time).

OU: Oh okay. In the ideal world if all countries were good then I wouldn't have any borders and I would let it be that way because if all countries were good and safe and had good social security systems then no one would feel the need to flee from the countries because of their regime or you know because of the governments screwing them up. (First author: Yeah) Then people would only move because of better reasons. Maybe they find a partner from another country or maybe they a get a job somewhere else and that's all right I think. And for those reasons, people shouldn't have problems moving.

First Author: Yeah, so you would free it up?

OU: Yeah.

First Author: No borders.

OU: No borders, no.

First Author: End up with a borderless world (OU, Interview, MMC4, Stockholm).

OU decides finally on the borderless world, travelling a great deal of distance within the study. She creates a good reason for moving. The key here is the extent to which she relates the ideals of multilateralism to migration, the movement of people. This is, of course, partly to do with the parameters of the study, which has asked her to answer questions on her own mobility. She had moved away from Sweden and met someone and then returned with him and settled back into Sweden. This, in Extract 12, becomes the alternative basis of movement for human beings to move for work, love or 'simple curiosity'.

7.3.6. Extract 12—A World without Wars

OU: If the world was an ideal place, without wars, hungers or politicians only looking after themselves instead of the people, then we wouldn't need borders. People would feel the need to move away from their home, only if they wanted to, for example if they met a partner from another country, got a job somewhere else, or simply were curious about another country (OU, MMC4, Stockholm: Final Statement on IWMT about her choice of Google Earth map of the world).

Several articles within this Special Issue point to the possibilities of alternative futures (Andrews et al. 2023), and OU's final statement illustrated the dialogical capacity to imagine possible future worlds when engaged in scientific studies that are designed with these temporalities in mind.

8. Discussion

This article contributes to building a bridge between *reified* understandings of multilateralism used by the UN and its General Secretary and *consensual* public understandings of multilateralism. It proposes that public understanding of nationalism and transnationalism within the context of populist re-bordering is foundational to building this bridge.

Within this article, we focused on three cases where, despite different degrees of migration–mobility ranging from YD, a citizen with generational non-mobility (MMC1), to OU, who lived abroad and returned to Sweden (MMC4), and an internal migrant PR who moved from England to Scotland (MMC6), all participants drew on differing political narratives to express an ideal of a border-free world.

In the case of participants with higher mobility, MMC7–MMC10, all participants did not put any lines on the world, fully explored in previous studies and dialogical analyses (Mahendran 2017; Mahendran et al. 2023). This ideal may well be due to the sample of participants along the Migration–Mobility Continuum or indeed be an artefact of our methods. We are aware that the design of the study could create a social desirability effect to not place borders. Of analytical interest to those exploring narratives of resistance is that participants who did place borders (half the participants) did so *whilst* simultaneously holding another *I*-position, that of someone who believed that, in an ideal world, we would not have any borders. The capacity of dialogical citizens to hold a variety of contradictory and complementary positions is a key dimension to studies that work with the idea of a dialogical self (Zittoun 2017; Mahendran et al. 2022), interplaying their micronarratives with the macro-narratives they are interpolated by (Mahendran et al. 2015; Nieland et al. 2022).

As we show in the dialogical analysis of these three case studies, a key component, the foundational abutment to the bridge, is the articulation of how the ideal of a border-free world that was found throughout our study connects to the public's articulation of multilateralism.

Future studies into public understanding of the multilateralism concept could further explore public sense-making within the (i) social relational and cooperative dimensions of multilateralism and (ii) the relationship between multilateralism and economic productivity. Our analysis showed these to be key dimensions when participants were brought into dialogue with a key paragraph of Guterres' 2018 address. Since beginning this article, Finland joined NATO on 4 April 2023, and Sweden's application is no longer blocked by Türkiye. Multilateralism is growing, though that multilateralism since the Russian invasion of Ukraine is potentially aligned along different polarities beyond the UN ideals. It is likely that, post-2022, the public will articulate new narratives around multilateralism. In recent years, there has been much talk of *inclusive multilateralism*, which recognises the extent to which the current discussion on multilateralism does not appear to be aimed at citizens but, rather, is focused on political actors within governments. We found that citizens, when invited to dialogue with Guterres, are not lost for words; rather, they draw on two key social representations relating to a cooperative world and a conflictual world (Staerklé et al. 2011; Mahendran et al. 2023). Equally, when articulating their social representation of cooperation, the basis of the alliance between countries may not be equal statuses but involve newly imagined neocolonial hierarchies or may involve a form of social multilateralism at the level of citizens rather than multilateralism between states.

The critical question becomes how can the political actors involved in articulating reified state actor accounts of multilateralism make a connection between such social representations of cooperation and conflict and the public's ideals about a border-free world that we have explored in this study. Making this connection is the central challenge, we propose, if we are to address Guterres' complaint that multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it the most. Further articulation of the ideal of a border-free world involves asking two research questions. First, why does such an ideal exist—what specific public narratives and social representations inform this ideal? Many critical migration scholars have argued against such an ideal, and OU argued that a smaller borderless word would increase hate as people became increasingly aware of their differences. Second, within the context of new nationalism (Eger and Valdez 2015; Korkut 2020; Bitonti et al. 2022) and decolonial considerations, as well as a loud, insistent populist re-bordering that characterises the European context of this study, how does the existing dialogue on multilateralism become engaged with this ideal?

Returning to the key themes of this Special Issue, the participants who express this ideal offer cooperative alternative futures before the pandemic began and before canonical accounts of togetherness within the risk of narratives of resilience (Müller and Tuitjert 2022; van Uden and van Houtum 2020), public-level cooperative cross-border ideals may well have found expression in the everyday lived practices of solidarity demonstrated during the pandemic and have the potential to be sustained during the post-pandemic recovery. But the hierarchical basis of such cooperation-shared identities remains a crucial question (English and Mahendran 2021).

9. Conclusions

Political and social psychologists, political scientists, narrative studies and, more generally, the social sciences are often preoccupied with xenophobic nationalism and the rise of nationalistic forms of populism and are actively engaged in studying them. We propose that, to understand the protectionist tensions that are likely to increase during the austerities of the post-pandemic recovery, rather than more studies into populism, such scholars need to consider directly investigating the public's narratives of and engagement with multilateralism. A valuable new departure for such scientists involves how this relates to their ideals about the world, their worldviews, their understandings of global orders and, increasingly, their *pandemicality*, in the sense of their dialogical capacity to think and act according to *planet views*.

Notes

1   Folkhemmet was originally a unifying social cohesion concept of the people's home used within the social democratic model but was successfully reappropriated by Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) (see author ref).

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Article

(Re)inspiring Narratives of Resistance: COVID-19, Racisms and Narratives of Hope

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Abstract: In 2020, COVID-19 took many people by surprise, as did the intercontinental waves of protest triggered by the casual racist murder of George Floyd by a US policeman. The years of 2020 and 2021 will undoubtedly be remembered for massive, unexpected disruptions that require new social normalities to be negotiated. These social disruptions were triggered by unexpected viral pandemics and viral video footage. Yet they built on already existing, entrenched inequities marked by the intersections of racialisation/ethnicisation, social class and gender. It was common, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, for politicians and commentators to espouse a narrative that COVID-19 "does not discriminate". This is, of course, true. However, the research analyses that followed showed that both COVID-19, and the measures taken to arrest it, exacerbated already existing social inequalities. This paper draws on two narratives of the racialized impact of COVID-19 to examine the ways in which the authors mobilise intertextual narratives to protest against racism and call for resistance to the racisms they identify. The paper argues that, while the authors do not overtly position themselves as calling for change, their narratives are crafted in ways that resist current constructions of their racialized or religious groups.

Keywords: intersectionality; narratives; COVID-19; racialization/ethnicization; positioning; hope; resistance; intertextuality

1. Introduction

I heard that we are in the same boat.

But it's not that.

We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine might not be.

Or vice versa . . .

Damian Barr 21 April 2020

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the US murder of George Floyd have both provoked many impassioned personal narratives. COVID-19 took many people by surprise, forcing dramatic change to their everyday practices and their future horizons in unexpected ways. The shock of a pandemic was compounded for many by the recognition that, across continents, COVID-19 was much more likely to kill those living in poverty and densely populated housing and those from minoritised ethnic groups (Bowleg 2020; Maestripieri 2021; Nazroo and Bécares 2021). It was a period when the narratives of everyday life were disrupted and new narratives had to be forged. The international waves of Black Lives Matter protest triggered by the video footage of the casual racist murder of George Floyd by a US policeman were partly stimulated because it occurred during the pandemic, when many people around the globe learned of it while confined to home. As with the pandemic, it also required new social norms to be negotiated and stimulated holistic thinking about the breadth of inequities that are part of racist oppression. Together, the local and global inequalities exposed by COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have foregrounded the urgency of the fight for social justice. Both sets of events illuminated

already-existing inequities marked by the intersections of racialisation/ethnicisation, social class and gender (Luttrell 2020). The demonstrations for Black Lives Matter and the toppling of various statues of enslavers and colonialists in several countries galvanised many people into social action and many businesses and universities into public responses. As is common with events that stimulate action and discussion because they highlight inequities, public discussion, and to some extent, commitment to change, have faded as the shock has receded. However, the recognition given by the media to the inequities they underline mean that numerous narratives have been produced in the service of social justice.

Since COVID-19 produced dramatic ruptures in everyday life for many people and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter also shifted many people's perspectives (Phoenix et al. 2020), it is not surprising that they also produced a range of personal and other narratives. As Bradbury (this volume) argues, "the experience of the pandemic has released and mobilised new forms of resistance". Dramatic disjunctions between canonical narratives (the ways in which it is expected life will be lived in a culture, Bruner 1990), and the lives that are actually being lived (Riessman 2008) are likely to stimulate the production of new narratives. As Cathy Riessman (2020) shows, biographical disruptions stimulate the narratives people produce and allow researchers insights into the social context in which they are produced. Riessman (2020, p. 122) suggests that:

> "A promising development in the field is the range of human problems now subjected to a narrative lens. The massive upheavals of migration in Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the world, and Black Lives Matter movements call out for documentation and study. This is a very different moment in history . . . the scale of disruptions today is huge . . . "

It is, therefore, not surprising that there has been a plethora of narratives, personal, journalistic and academic, in a variety of sites, which protest against the injustice of inequities and call for new social arrangements. If successful, these "narratives of resistance" can play an important part in holding up to scrutiny the lived experiences of injustice, bringing together the personal and the structural. They can also contribute to shifts in values and understanding if they gain support (Anciano and Wheeler 2021). Narrative resistance resists the kind of storying that (re)produces negative constructions of minoritised groups and (implicitly) maintains oppressive power (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2017; Sylvester 2019). Instead, it resists both everyday and political oppression, as well as racist, sexist and homophobic ideology (Burnett 2014). It can be used to articulate collective values in relation to social justice, showing how individual trauma is part of collective and political experience (Anciano and Wheeler 2021). It is striking that both COVID-19 and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter brought together new collectivities across socially constructed borders of racialisation, gender and social class. Anciano and Wheeler (2021, p. 18) suggest that it is the

> "reframing of dominant narratives through a counter-story that leads to its inclusion in the justice and political system. This dynamic is part of the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement. New narratives and counter-narratives hold the potential to provide systematic social justice."

Resistance narratives, therefore, implicitly or explicitly encompass "counter narratives" which, as Molly Andrews has pointed out, counter the dominant master narratives circulating in society and "offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews 2004, p. 1). They are also narratives of hope in that a major motive for resistance is to stake claims to improving conditions and society. They are, however, far from simple in that the contestation they entail involves difficult relations and runs the risk of failure (Squire, this volume).

This paper draws on two written narratives, one from a British writer (although published in a US fashion magazine) and the other in a popular online shortform academic publication by a Canadian writer. They have been selected as examples that function

simultaneously as insider resistance narratives, tell a broader and more academic story, and give insights into how resistance narratives are produced in different ways, in the first case as a contextualized and historicised personal narrative and in the second as a focused, academic argument. They discuss the historical and/or more general issues for people in their ethnicised and/or religious categories, rather than just themselves. Both bring oppressive relations that are not widely known to public attention. Together, they offer possibilities for the analysis of the nature and the performativity of resistance narratives and how they aim to build collective responses that can help to move the political system towards social justice (Anciano and Wheeler 2021). Both focus on COVID-19 but, in talking about racism, draw on the themes and tropes made available by public discussions inspired by the resurgence of Black Lives Matter. As written accounts, they are reflective and present narratives that the authors have had a chance to rework as they wish, rather than stories that are developed as they speak.

Both narratives examine how the dramatic, unexpected and transformational events of COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd have inspired and re-inspired pain, anger and narratives of resistance to the inequities they have exposed. The paper argues that they have produced new political narratives that can inspire hope and new social understandings. It first discusses the importance of narratives to producing resistance and the place of hope in such narratives. The third, main part of the paper analyses the two sets of written narratives to discuss ways in which the conjunctions of 2020 and 2021 proved transformational in inspiring the production of (new) narratives of political resistance, impelling some people to campaign (in very different ways) for change towards greater equity and social justice. The chapter argues that the complex reasons that impelled these narratives include hope for "liveable" futures (Butler 2004).

2. Narrative Futures and Hope

There is multidisciplinary agreement that understanding events, the world and our position in it, the past, present and future all require storying (Meretoja 2022; Nelson and Fivush 2020). The stories we tell ourselves and other people help to craft our identities and so narratives enable people to engage in particular social and political actions (Polletta and Chen 2012; Riessman 2002). The power of narratives lie in their construction and presentation of meanings, the explanations they give and imply and the characters they include as relevant or omit. Transformation and change thus require shifts in the stories we tell, a process that happens over time, but one that can be precipitated by events. Andrews (2014, p. 1) suggests that "narrative and imagination are integrally tied to one another" and that the importance of narrative imagination cannot be overstated for "our elevated thoughts about the world as it might be, but also in the very minutiae of our daily lives". Andrews shows that political action and desires to reach a particular future involve acts of narrative imagination in the everyday, whether or not the imagined futures are realised.

Transformation and the stories we tell are, therefore, inextricably linked and stories change the lives of societies and individuals in unanticipated ways. This is because personal identities are inextricably linked with sociostructural and cultural norms and contexts. A good example is provided by a study conducted by Ruthellen Josselson (2009) in which she followed nineteen women in the USA over a period of 46 years. An important finding was that the stories the women told changed in relation to what was happening in their lives when they were interviewed and how society had changed. "Maria", for example, who came from an Italian American family, repeatedly recounted the narrative of a serious relationship she had in her twenties with a young African American man. However, over time she reshaped the story. As Josselson (2009) shows, the meanings she derived are temporally situated as products of their time, and relational. Different meanings were made possible by personal and social changes. This very much fits with Bruner's (1990) notion that the individual story is also the story of the culture. As Bradbury (2020, p. 19) suggests, "[an] individual life history is entwined with the wider historical processes of

our collective life and the narrative self is never disconnected from the narratives of others, past, present and future".

We come to understand our identities by hearing ourselves tell stories to different people (or writing them), hearing their stories about us and telling ourselves stories designed to make sense of our lives. This indicates the process by which Stuart Hall's (Hall and Gay 1996) notion that identities are about becoming as well as being, becomes relevant and links identities with the contention of many narrative scholars that narratives are stories told in the present, about the past, in anticipation of the future (Elliott 2005). As the US linguistic anthropologist Ochs (1994) suggests, some conversational stories "step into the future". The stories we tell always have political implications and, as powerfully persuasive rhetorical devices, can mobilise future action (Polletta and Chen 2012).

The power and complexity of narrative for mobilizing future action is concisely set out by Mary Chamberlain.

"Memory and narrative are shaped by social categories, by language and priorities, by experience and tense, by choice and context. They are shaped also by imagination, by dreams and nightmares, hopes and fantasies which, however private they may feel, are moulded by culture. We recall past events through present time, and the present always anticipates the future. The past also contained at some stage a future, what might have been and what may yet be." (Mary Chamberlain 1997, p. 10)

It is perhaps not surprising then that the unexpected transformational conjunctions of COVID-19 and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter produce contestations and show the interlinking of the personal and sociostructural. The destabilization that many people felt led them to produce new understandings of their identities where personal and sociocultural stories were brought into being in new ways. The conjunction of these events not only led to an outpouring of personal stories, but also to demands to change society and the global world order.

It is here that notions of hope become important, since hope is central to inspiring the production of new narratives and visions that can resist the status quo and make claims to a different future. Paulo Freire (1994), the Brazilian educator and philosopher made hope central to his philosophy and critical pedagogy, but saw hope and struggle as inextricably linked and that hope had to be taught and learned.

"Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope." (Freire 1994, p. 3)

In keeping with this Rebecca Solnit (2020, p. 5) suggests that political agency requires hope because "[hope] just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope". This sentiment is commonly expressed by scholars who point out that hope is essential for social change, or even everyday living.

"The more desperate a situation is, the stronger the hope . . . Hope stretches the limits of what is possible. It is linked with that basic trust in life without which we could not get from one day to the next . . . Without this sense of possibility . . . There will be no flourishing. To live by hope is to believe that it is worth taking the next step; that our actions, our families, our cultures and societies have meaning, are worth living and dying for . . . to be without hope is to be trapped. It is to be helpless, to have no sense that it is worth getting out of bed, taking a decision." (Mary Grey 1999)

In relation to COVID-19, Nesbit-Larking and McCauley (this volume) suggest that, as with any crisis, the pandemic has stimulated future visions and provided opportunities for revitalization and the sense of possibility because of the disjunctive need to do things differently. While, however, hope and the future vision it entails is essential to change, it is

also precarious. Although she was writing three years before COVID-19 came to be widely recognized, Rebecca Solnit seems prescient in suggesting that

> "This is an extraordinary time full of vital, transformative movements that could not be foreseen. It's also a nightmarish time. Full engagement requires the ability to perceive both." (Rebecca Solnit 2017)

This bipolar conceptualisation of hope cautions against the dangers of romanticising hope and of "over-optimistic excesses" and "naïve possibilitarianism" in order to avoid what Lauren Berlant (2011) called "cruel optimism" in favour of "a justified perseverance of hope" (Meer 2022, p. 130). It is also collective and collaborative work. Meaningful hope, therefore, has to be produced through future-oriented imagination and rooted in the everyday, rather than in an escapist ideology (Back 2015). As Giuliana Mandich (2020, p. 683) put it, hope is "modes of engagement with the future in everyday life" where social action makes the future. Those modes of engagement with the future have to include both axiological commitments to a desired future and hence to hope for the crafting of "liveable lives" (Butler 2004). This recognition of the importance of hope for taking political action towards a future requires the rethinking of social action to conceptualise it as including ways of knowing and imagining social transformation. Hope is, therefore, inextricable from power relations since they shape social phenomena (Collins 2019). It is interlinked with intersectional inequalities since intersectionality is epistemological, and "is a knowledge project whose raison d'être lies in its attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities". For Ghassan Hage (2016) fruitful theorizing of hope entails "modes of imagining one's own hope with the hope of others and not at their expense. That is, it is an invitation for a politics of co-hoping". While the notion of co-hoping may seem strange since hope has often been conceptualised in individualised terms, Hage's invitation makes clear that hoping is collective, political activity that has a social justice morality in that political co-hoping in Hage's terms is not designed to further the individual's cause at other people's expense. Arguably, co-hoping makes it less likely that group hoping will be naïve or over-optimistic.

Given these complexities, contradictions and potential for hope to generate "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011; Meer 2022), it is not surprising that those seeking to make claims to new futures may sometimes avoid direct claims. Both narratives below make logical cases that proleptically function to deflect potential contestation. Both make indirect claims by presenting what are designed to be incontrovertible examples of racist injustice. Their accounts are presented at length since the narratives are developed across several paragraphs and the ways in which they stake their claim is less apparent in short extracts.

3. #StopAsianHate

The extract analysed below comes from an articloe written by Zing Tsjeng (2021), a Singaporean-British journalist, author and podcaster who has long lived in the UK. One of the aims was to show that "anti-Asian hate" is as much part of the UK as it is the USA. It was published in Harper's Bazaar, the oldest American monthly women's fashion magazine, on 18 March 2021. Tsjeng entitled it "It's time we stopped downplaying the UK's anti-Asian racism".

> "It's tempting to see this anti-Asian hate as a uniquely contemporary American problem, and that's how British contributors to the hashtag have tended to position it. But hate crimes against East and South East Asian (ESEA) people have increased in the UK, too. According to the advocacy group End the Virus of Racism, there has been a 300 per cent increase in hate crimes towards people of East and Southeast Asian heritage since the start of the pandemic."

> "In March of last year, Jonathan Mok—a 23-year-old student who, like me, is from Singapore—was assaulted so badly that he required facial surgery. Just last week, a bloody photo of a university lecturer named Peng Wang circulated the internet after he was attacked in Southampton."

"I feel the same way now as I did watching the videos of Asian-American elders getting assaulted—a queasy drop in my stomach, the sense that I am observing myself through a dark mirror. After years of being systematically underrepresented in mainstream media—when merely spotting a Chinese face on a British TV show would make my mother shout for me to come to the living room—faces like mine are now overrepresented, for all the wrong reasons."

"This racist hatred is nothing new. Speak to any kid who grew up in an Asian takeaway in the UK and they'll have tales of their parents fending off drunk, racist customers. Coronavirus has only sharpened this inchoate prejudice and renamed it 'kung flu'. As far back as World War II, the Home Office conspired with shipping companies in Liverpool on mass deportations of "undesirable" Chinese sailors who were striking for better pay, even after they had served in the British Merchant Navy and started families of their own. As one woman remembered it: "He just went out to the shop, and my mum was waiting for him to come home, and he never came."

"My theory is that this kind of trauma lingers deep in the roots of a country. The conventional understanding of first-generation immigrants is that they were too focused on building their new lives and didn't rock the boat. But if the alternative was to speak up and be ripped away from your home, what choice did they have?"

"We exist, but do we matter?" … Even today, politicians don't seem ready to engage with the concerns of the ESEA community—Labour MP Sarah Owen describes seeing other politicians describe Chinese people as "evil bastards" and sharing racist caricatures. 33 per cent of the images used to report on COVID-19 in the UK featured Asian people—even though we all know by now that coronavirus is a disease that afflicts people of all backgrounds. These are all acts of racism, pure and simple, and yet no one has taken responsibility for them."

"Then there's the well-known micro-aggressions that grind your anger down into a dull nub. You can spot them coming: there's always a weird glint in the eye of someone who's determined to use the word "Oriental", their awe that you can string a sentence together in basic English; the go-homes and where-are-you-*really*-froms; the stereotyping that sees ESEA men typecast as desexualised geeks and women as fetish objects."

"I've told my friends these stories and laughed it off. Now I wonder if I was complicit in my own silencing. I've told the same friends about the racist messages sent to me on social media, about the woman who said "alright, ching chong?" in my face as I got out of Old Street tube, and their reactions change from amusement to horror. I don't feel as if anything has changed, and yet I know it has. The atmosphere feels different—that familiar prickle of dread is now tinged with fear."

Tsjeng's article is resonant of, and intertextual with, with material published for #StopAsianHate, a blog started in 2021 by Medium to chronicle xenophobia and anti-Asian racism in the USA. It was fuelled by the spike in hate crime against people considered to look as if they might be Chinese following the identifying of COVID-19 in China. Its inspiration is overt, gross, racist attacks in the context of COVID-19. However, it is clearly also inspired by the numerous personal narratives produced in 2020 and 2021, mainly by black people in response to the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, but also by allies, about experiences of racism. Riessman (2020) gives pointers to doing analysis in this period.

"In the contemporary period, new and important questions are being asked of narrative segments: who is allowed to talk about their experience? Who is listening? Whose story is valued? Who gains from the research relationship?" (Riessman 2020, p. 122)

The answer to the question of "who is allowed to talk about their experience?" was undoubtedly changed by the unexpected reactions to George Floyd's murder and the mobilisation by Black Lives Matter, which gave new forms of authorisation to narratives of experiences of racism. Not surprisingly, there was a flood of these in many different media and modes. They produced the Foucault (1977) "conditions of possibility" for Tsjeng to write her narrative of resistance to racism in a traditional, mainstream fashion magazine that might not have been expected to carry such material, and for a wider audience to listen. This is not apparent in Tsjeng's article because she does not mention Black Lives Matter or George Floyd. However, as Julia Kristeva (1980) explained, all texts are intertextual, shaped by other texts. Writing about experiences of racist attack in 2021, it would be difficult not to be influenced by the many narratives of racism that had been published over the previous twelve months. Indeed, the question "we exist, but do we matter?" apparently alludes to a Black Lives Matter slogan. The fact that many such narratives had been published and taken seriously would give hope that such narratives would also be taken seriously and valued in a way that would not have been possible previously.

The big story that Tsjeng tells is of the longstanding nature of anti-South Asian racism and of its increasing seriousness. The plurality and specificity of different forms of racisms has long been identified in academic work (Brah 1996). However, it is an idea that is gaining traction as increasing numbers of people recognise that, for example, hate crimes against those considered Chinese-looking increased enormously in the UK and USA following the identification of COVID-19 in China, but did not increase for other groups (Gray and Hansen 2021). It is not, therefore, that Tsjen's narrative discusses racism in general, despite its intertextual relation with Black Lives Matter. Instead, it addresses highly specific examples of racism against South Asians. In order to craft a convincing case, she presents four small stories (Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou 2021). First, she sets up a context from where she makes an unassailable case that there are real hate crimes against South Asians in the UK. She does this by citing statistical sources and individual cases that exemplify the statistics. The individual cases provide an entry point for her to position herself within the narrative and claim a narrative identity. Her second small story builds credibility by explaining that, like a student who was badly assaulted, she comes from Singapore, before describing her feelings of sickness about seeing videos of "Asian-American elders getting assaulted". When first she brings in her personal narrative, it is to present herself as an expert witness, an insider. She rounds off the article by bringing herself into the narrative again. This time, she calls in witnesses, her friends, who she explains that she has told stories of the racism she has experienced. Her reported reaction to telling her own stories is that they "laughed it off". This serves to counter a charge that Tsjeng presumably knows is possible, that she could be accused of over-inflating episodes she recounts. This refusing of implicit charges of over-reaction provides the context for her description of their changed reactions to the current racist messages sent to her on social media and the name calling to which she is subjected. She constructs their changed reactions as validating her conclusion that things are worse and that she now feels a familiar dread together with a new fear of racist attack. This ending helps to underline the big story that constitutes a narrative of resistance to racist attacks against South Asians and implicit hope through claims for opposition to them.

Tsjeng's third small story is about a normalised absence/pathologised presence (Phoenix 1997) in the representation of Asian Americans. She points out that "After years of being systematically underrepresented in mainstream media—when merely spotting a Chinese face on a British TV show would make my mother shout for me to come to the living room—faces like mine are now overrepresented, for all the wrong reasons." It is only in discussing representations of Asians that she mentions COVID-19 as producing pathologised presence, "33 per cent of the images used to report on COVID-19 in the UK featured Asian people—even though we all know by now that coronavirus is a disease that afflicts people of all backgrounds". She also mentions Orientalist "microaggressions", the pathologized presence stereotypes of East and South East Asian men and women.

Her fourth small story historically contextualises anti-Asian racist hatred and does so by describing generalised racist experiences of Asian families that ran takeaway restaurants and UK Home Office mass deportations of Chinese sailors who were striking for better pay. She theorises these histories as deep trauma for the country and as limiting migrant Chinese people's opportunities for speaking out—themes that are also features of Black Lives Matter.

While this is not a research article, in relation to Riessman's third question above, Tsjeng uses academic techniques in laying out the prevalence of anti-Asian attacks and contextualising them in history and social structures. "Who gains from the research relationship?" is relevant in terms of working out the potential impact of the narrative. The analysis above makes clear that Tsjeng has written the piece in resistance to anti-Asian racism, with the aim of making it visible and to stir her readership to opposition to it. It is, therefore, resistance to anti-Asian racism that, although it does not mention anti-black racism, is inspired by the unexpected transformational conjunction of racism that inspired the resurgence of, Black Lives Matter.

The choice to publish the article in a fashion magazine is both one of resistance and of hope. It is a narrative of resistance because it tells an explicitly anti-racist story that brooks no denial of racism by contextualising its case in history, statistics and personal experience. The fact that it is a narrative of hope is more implicit, but the setting out of her case and the populating of the narrative with friends who are horrified by her explanation of the name-calling she experiences both makes horror an explicable response, constructs allies against racism and stakes a claim for social change.

4. Contradictory Positioning: Intersectionality and COVID-19 Mask Wearing

The second example analysed in this paper comes from the academic shortform publication, *The Conversation* that focuses on contemporary research relevant to a currently pressing issue. The article is entitled "Unmasking the racial politics of the coronavirus pandemic". It is written by Jasmin Zine (2020), a Professor of Sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. As with Tsjeng's narrative above, she is concerned with the intersection of ethnicisation and COVID-19. She crafts her narrative by discussing examples of the differential receptions of mask wearing for various ethnic groups:

> "While primarily a protective measure, the COVID-19 mask has also become a cultural icon. In western nations it has become a marker of social responsibility and good citizenship. It represents the wearer's compliance with public safety and communal well being through exercising care for one's self and others . . . wearing a protective mask signifies a commitment to the social and collective good of society.

> But how does that perception change when a face mask is worn by someone who is Asian? Or a Black man? Why do some jurisdictions outlaw the face veil or niqab worn by some Muslim women while mandating protective masks . . .

> Rather than exemplifying a commitment to the public good, an abundance of pictures of Asian individuals wearing masks may have accelerated the circulation of derogatory stereotypes. Research has shown Canadian press photos related to the 2003 SARS crisis used Asians wearing masks as a dominant image. With COVID 19, the trend of using masked Asian faces as the emblem of the crisis continues the trajectory of these racist depictions.

> Instead of representing a good citizen helping to stop the spread of a possible contagion, a protective mask transforms Asian bodies into the source of contagion. Trump's insistence in referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" dangerously reinforced the racializing of this disease . . .

> A campaign spearheaded by a Black clergy in Illinois in co-operation with local police, called "Tipping the Mask", asked people to show shopkeepers their faces when entering stores to mitigate against potential racial fears and violence.

> A Black pastor recommended that his son put on his mask once he is already in the store for "fear of what others might think when they see a Black man in a mask."
>
> The concept of "mask tipping" calls upon racialized bodies to reveal themselves as "safe" and in return avoid biases and endangerment . . .
>
> Muslim women who wear a niqab are not considered good liberal citizens because their covered faces are deemed culturally irreconcilable with western society. They face being penalized for violating the law while those wearing COVID-19 masks are seen as good citizens upholding the public good.
>
> The COVID-19 mask is a barrier to transmission of the virus while the niqab is a barrier to social inclusion.
>
> Not having to think about how one's body is read by others when wearing a mask is a privilege of whiteness that eludes racialized groups. White mask privilege includes: not having to bear the racial stigma of being seen as a foreign disease carrier, being safe whether or not you "tip your mask", having the ability to cover your face in public and not be denied social services.
>
> Rather than serving as a levelling device the cultural politics behind wearing masks exposes the racial fault lines of the pandemic."

Zine is explicit in identifying the message she wants to convey, which is encapsulated in her final paragraph, that the pandemic serves to expose racialized inequalities. Having built towards her conclusion by presenting evidence about different racialized/ethnicised/gendered groups, the conclusion serves to present resistance both to treating the pandemic as equalizing (in keeping with what many others have pointed out) and to resist the racism that predated COVID-19 and intensifies already-existing inequalities. The interpretation and acceptance of mask wearing as she shows is relational, dependent on the socially constructed groups to which people belong. The question of the impact of mask wearing for different ethnicised groups enables Zine to undertake intersectional analyses by examining ethnicity as it intersects with gender and religion, such as in the cases of Muslim women who wear niqabs and Black US men's wearing of COVID-19 masks. It also allows her to show how minoritised ethnic groups are differentially racialized, even though they are equally negatively racialized and subjected to racisms. She also argues that white people wearing masks are able to take for granted their unearned racialized privilege in not being treated negatively as they wear their COVID-19 masks, exemplified in the extract below.

> "Not having to think about how one's body is read by others when wearing a mask is a privilege of whiteness that eludes racialized groups. White mask privilege includes: not having to bear the racial stigma of being seen as a foreign disease carrier, being safe whether or not you "tip your mask", having the ability to cover your face in public and not be denied social services."

An implicit part of Zine's article is that it is possible to see psychosocial (personal and sociostructural) differences in even the apparently most mundane items and practices. It is striking that she features embodiment as central. She makes the case that bodies are presented as the source of contagion (South Asians), as dangerous (black men) and as signifying non-belonging to the nation (Muslim niqab-wearing women and South Asians). Just as with Tsjeng's article, all these analyses are intertextual narratives that gain their potency because Zine is able to demonstrate what many readers will already know, that there are pre-existing racialized narratives that pathologise the bodies of these groups. In bringing them together and developing her narrative, she makes a strong, implicit case for disrupting such narratives and resisting the racism from which they stem. The article was published after George Floyd's murder and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, and George Floyd is mentioned in the article, but Black Lives Matter is not. This absence may be because the aim is to avoid engaging in political rhetoric in order to make a strong case

for a wide readership. However, the sub-title, "Mask-wearing while Black", intertextually resonates with other such formulations popularised by various campaigns, including Black Lives Matter, such as "Driving while Black" (Harris 1999).

A further theme is that the bodies of minoritised ethnic groups are both subjected to scrutiny and expected to behave in ways that make them acceptable to the white majority. They are, thus positioned in contradictory narratives of mask wearing and mask wearing is read as a negative signifier justifying racist treatment or even death (for black men). Face coverings for niqab-wearing Muslim women in European countries and the USA have long been derided, sometimes viewed as legitimate targets for ripping off and sometimes prohibited. Minoritised ethnic groups are, therefore, held to a different standard from the white majority. The overall narrative Zine constructs is, therefore, one of exclusion from belonging to the nation. It may seem that Zine's is not a hopeful narrative. However, it is a contemporary academic narrative written for a publication designed to reach a wide readership and inform and maybe change minds. Zine has carefully laid out her case in ways that make the exclusions and contradictory positioning she identifies illegitimate. It is, therefore, underpinned by hope that the article can make a difference.

5. Re-Inspiring Narratives of Resistance

The two articles presented above both produce narratives that spell out the racialized/ethnicized inequities that predated COVID-19 and analyse the ways in which responses to aspects of COVID-19 exacerbate the racism to which various groups are subjected. The conditions of possibility for the narratives they present were the conjunctions of unexpected events (COVID-19 and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter following the murder of George Floyd) that facilitated protest narratives, including those surrounding racism. These major "biographical disruptions" (Riessman 2020) enabled both authors to stake claims to social justice and against racism. In both cases, while they focused on COVID-19, their narratives were intertextual in that their narratives resonated with claims for equality that various social movements, particularly Black Lives Matter, have highlighted.

Both articles demonstrate the power of narrative in seeking to humanize groups which, as they demonstrate through vivid examples, have been excluded from normative inclusion in the nation. While both present strong cases showing how racism is expressed against groups they represent, they do not directly call for particular actions against racism. Yet the narrative analysis of how they present their cases shows that they are carefully crafted in resistance to the racisms they identify and are designed to advocate resistance for their readership. As Bell Hooks (2016, p. 227) suggests, "one of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone". Both narratives above show that the issues they address are not individualised.

A major difference between the two articles is that Tsjeng positions herself within the narrative, taking up an identity as Singaporean Asian and an insider to experiences of racism that she describes. Zine, on the other hand, maintains an academic distance from her narrative, so that the reader is left in ignorance of her positioning in the narrative. As a result, although they present cases in similar ways, Tsjeng's narrative is openly emotional, suggesting pain and naming fear, while Zine's account is likely to evoke emotions, but does not name or show them. The meanings and explanations that they are hoping to shift through the stories they tell illustrate their advocacy for change and transformation, and their implicit agenda of inspiring hope. This implicitness is narratively strategic in that it avoids the danger of failure (Squire 2020) and of romanticising hope in the "cruel optimism of racial justice" (Meer 2022). Instead, both articles produce narratives of resistance that make strong cases rooted in the everyday in order to produce imaginings of the future (Back 2015; Mandich 2020).

Bell Hooks (2003, p. xiv) says that "My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them." Both authors aim to transform the world by documenting the illegitimacy of racism and its

effects on different minoritised ethnic groups. In Ghassan Hage's (2016) formulation, they advocate co-hoping, rather than individualising the issues. Their "narratives enlarge the space of possibilities in which we can act, think, and re-imagine the world together with others and how they restrain or impoverish this space" (Meretoja 2017, p. 6). Both articles contribute to the numerous calls for social justice following COVID-19 and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter. Through telling convincing stories, they fuel a re-imagination of hope that greater awareness will lead to action against racism (Andrews 2014; Polletta 2016). In documenting their stories, they make a potential contribution to producing turning points in relation to racism. Giroux (1983), suggests that the nature and meaning of acts of resistance is linked to the emancipation and enhancement of individual power in relation to dominant groups. In choosing to craft their narratives as they have and place them in publications designed to reach wide audiences who might be affected by them, both Tsjeng and Zine can be said to have enhanced the power of minoritised ethnic groups and so produced successful and hopeful narratives of resistance. In Judith Butler's (2004) terms, they make claims to "liveable lives" and liveable futures. The fact that "these hopeful threads of alternative narratives are fragile, improvised in the weighty conditions of a status quo resistant to change" (Bradbury, this volume) makes these written accounts both important in themselves and intertextual claims to social justice that buttress what Hage (2016) calls co-hoping.

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Article

Enforcing and Resisting Hindutva: Popular Culture, the COVID-19 Crisis and Fantasy Narratives of Motherhood and Pseudoscience in India

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Abstract: This article analyzes how Hindu nationalists employ fantasy narratives to counteract resistance, with a particular focus on narratives of 'motherhood' and 'pseudoscience'. It does so by first introducing a conceptual discussion of the relationship between fantasy narratives, ontological insecurity, gender, and anti-science as a more general interrelationship characterizing pre- and post-COVID-19 far-right societies and leaders, such as India. It then moves on to discuss such fantasy narratives in the case of India by highlighting how this has played out in two cases of Hindu nationalist imaginings: that of popular culture, with a specific focus on the town Varanasi and the film Water (produced in 2000), and that of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging crisis and resistance that it has entailed. Extracts of interviews are included to illustrate this resistance.

Keywords: resistance; COVID-19; far right; nationalism; gender; pseudoscience; ontological security; India

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic may currently be in its final phase considering the opening up and easing of restrictions in many parts of the world, but its lasting legacies are still to be understood and evaluated in relation to past and present nationalist (and other) practices. Most important is how the pandemic shaped a widely dispersed state of uncertainty and how responses to such uncertainties contained various kinds of memorialized nationalist story-making. Quarantine, lockdowns, and closed borders largely induced a 'new normality' by undermining and unsettling the ordinary routines that create a sense of continuity and provide answers to questions about 'doing, acting, and being', what Giddens (1991) refers to as ontological security. The pandemic thus functioned as a crisis narrative by exposing the fragility of political life, with its intrinsic doubts, anxieties, and uncertainties. In this sense, the political response to the pandemic was closely tied to the conjuring up of secure images of the future, involving some kinds of fantastical predictions and visions concerning what that future may look like, how particular re-memorialized pasts are to be blamed or glorified, and the specific actors responsible for the crisis. As much work on far-right populism has shown, such responses often take on a nativist and gendered dimension and are particularly common among politicians and leaders on the far right, who aim towards narrative closure of what a nation is, who is to be its rightful owners, and who should be excluded.

These fantasy narratives have also converged in many Hindu populist imaginings, in which specific emotions become tied to fantastical visions of the past, present, and future, involving everything from fabricated lies to myths and re-imagined memories of a past glorious order. Traditional and digital media discourses, as well as popular culture, have been crucial for the spread of such sentiments and have allowed for visual symbols, imagery, and mythological tales about imaginary pasts and 'others' to be securitized and

sedimented. As political storytelling, popular culture provides a prominent avenue for both hegemonic discourse and resistance to take form. Either in terms of hegemonic (and in our case gendered nativist) stories with fantasized beginnings, presents, and ends in response to ontological insecurities, or as ruptures to this hegemonic logic with a possibility to resist, disturb, or counter the hegemonic narrative. Through its increasing digitization, political storytelling has enabled access to mass audiences at the same time as it has allowed for fabricated images, fantasies, and myths to take the shape of 'real' events and 'real' historical patterns. In this article, we discuss these myths and re-imagined memories in relation to nationalist fantasy narratives in India and how resistance to such narratives has been met by a hegemonic repressive Hindu, or Hindutva, populist discourse before and during the time of the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As a nationalist narrative, Hindutva thrives on fantasies originating from the Indian past and centers on narratives of 'Indian motherhood', often in relation to fantastical (fictional) images of Muslim (and other minority) others. Hindu nationalism relies on the idea that India, that is Bharat, once a Vishwa guru—the master of the world—is the original home to Hindus. In the nationalist narrative, only Hindus are the authentic natives of the land and Hindu women are sacred goddesses born to serve the family and the nation. Relying on these fantasy narratives, Hindu nationalists tend to portray 'resistance' to this national narrative as 'anti-national' (anti-Bharat) and 'anti-Hindu' (Anand 2011; Juergensmeyer 2000; Kaul 2021; Kinnvall 2006). These fantasy narratives do not exist in a vacuum, however, but have been met by defiance from various civil society movements of the Indian society, such as minority groups, secularists, academics, and human rights activists, manifesting at the local to the national levels and organized by both individuals and numerous organizations. Some of this resistance is ad-hoc, un-coordinated, and limited to the elites, whereas some has developed into major political movements with large popular support. The response from Hindutva forces to such resistance has been to reject the claims of these groups or individuals through a discourse of cultural fantasy narratives.

This article hence analyzes how Hindu nationalists employ fantasy narratives to counteract resistance and construct an illusory form of ontological security for those identifying as Hindus. This entails a particular focus on how the narrative of 'motherhood' has defined Hindu nationalist fantasies over time and how this narrative became linked to narratives of 'pseudoscience' during the COVID-19 pandemic. It does so by first introducing a conceptual discussion of the relationship between fantasy narratives, insecurity, gender, and pseudo/anti-science as a more general interrelation characterizing far-right societies and leaders, such as India. It then moves on to discuss such fantasy narratives in the case of India by highlighting how Hindu nationalist imaginings have played out in two cases: that of popular culture, with a specific focus on the film Water (produced in 2000), and that of the COVID-19 pandemic and its emerging crisis and resistance. These events are more than 20 years apart and were not chosen for comparative reasons, but to explore and illustrate how Hindu nationalists have consistently used fantasy narratives of 'motherhood' as ontological security-seeking practices, and how resistance to such narratives has continued to be met by repression and violence. Narratives of the anti-Water Hindutva movement were about reaffirming nostalgia in terms of the sacredness of Hindu women in ancient India and their imposition in the modern context. The movement was also about asserting the superiority of Hindu culture and ancient Indian mythical knowledge. Both have re-emerged in the recent pandemic context through a privileging of a pseudoscience that takes its point of departure in narrative fantasies of Vedic science and motherhood. Hence, the article shows how continuity in fantasy narratives can work as ontological security-seeking practices over time that reassert dominance and hegemony in the face of resistance. Extracts of interviews are included to illustrate both the persistence of and the resistance to such fantasy narratives.[1]

Hence, the next section provides a theoretical overview of ontological insecurities and gendered fantasy narratives with a particular focus on the far right and anti/pseudoscience. We then move on to show how such gendered fantasy narratives, in particular narratives of

'motherhood', have been employed and resisted in relation to popular culture and the film *Water*. Following this, we highlight some cases of resistance against the Hindu nationalist government of Narendra Modi before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we discuss gendered fantasy narratives of motherhood in relation to how 'pseudoscience' as Vedic science was employed by Hindu nationalists during the pandemic in face of such resistance.

Ontological Insecurities and Gendered Fantasy Narratives: The Far Right and Pseudo/Anti-Science

Across the world, we see how people are turning (or are turned) towards nationalist, xenophobic, ultra-conservative, and/or authoritarian movements, parties, and leaders. In their more authoritarian versions, such movements may rely on more or less repressive measures to reign in or crack down on dissent and critical voices, but ultimately even these movements or leaders need some kind of societal support structure. Hence, in their efforts to capture and harness emotional support, many of these movements (and leaders) channel and govern emotions in their broadest sense to reach an audience increasingly beset by securing its everyday existence. Behind this turn towards the far right seems to be a belief that such movements can somehow solve political, economic, cultural, and ideological uncertainties by providing simplified solutions to complex questions. In their nationalist version, they do this by providing a narrative (often in terms of a fantasy snapshot) of the state (and the nation) as stable, uniform, and strong in order to encompass anxiety, neutralize anger, and relieve guilt, while also fulfilling imagined needs for pride, attachment, and desire (Steele and Homolar 2019, p. 214; Browning 2016, 2019; Kinnvall 2018; Mälksoo 2016; Subotić 2016). Insecurity may be one of the most general conditions of human life, and one that is always intimately tied to inequality, social justice, and violence. For some people, especially those whose lives are marked by wars, displacement, urban marginalization, and the effects of climate change and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity is an ever-present potentiality and experience. However, insecurity is not only about structural (economic, political, and social), epidemic, and environmental realities, it is equally about the narratives, images, and fantasies conveyed through media and political rhetoric about these real or perceived realities.

This is where the notion of ontological security comes in, a concept introduced by psychoanalyst R.D. Laing (1960) and developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) to account for the effects of late modernity on people's sense of security. Giddens refers to ontological security as a 'security of being', of creating a feeling of a whole and autonomous self. However, in reality, it is a process of 'becoming', as the strive for ontological security is always only a temporary and incomplete process of closing down particular narrative imaginations, fantasies, and desires in order to feel secure in the here and now (Browning 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson 2022). In this, reality and fantasy are always co-constituted, as 'fantasy' is a critical component of world-enactment and conceptualizations of political reality (Sass 2015). From a Lacanian perspective, "fantasy is the narrative frame that constitutes and stabilizes the subjective sense of reality [. . .]. Therefore, fantasy captures the process whereby subjects (social actors) relate to and reproduce reality (social structures) by outlining the relationship between subjectivity, social order, and desire" (Eberle 2019, p. 245). In the nativist version of far-right nationalism, fantasies are intimately tied to what Giddens has referred to as a 'sense of place', in which spaces and narratives about certain locales offer important imaginary anchors for political leaders to pin down unknown anxieties amongst the electorate (Ejdus 2017; Subotic 2018; Della Sala 2018). As Kinnvall and Svensson (2022, p. 532) have argued: "Fantasies of past traumas and glories often become 'real' in the hands of far-right leaders, who convey narratives and images of humiliation and shame as well as of pride and superiority to their followers [. . .]—thus purporting to ascertain and satisfy a perpetual desire through fantasmatic (fictional) closure and wholeness" (see also Homolar and Löfflmann 2021).

In such versions, fantasies are inadvertently tied up with a masculinist logic and gendered nationalism. Gendered nationalism is thus embroiled in masculinist claims of 'protection', 'manhood', 'imperial loss', and 'mythical pasts', often fueled by the idea of a strong nation that has been weakened by femininization (Nicholas and Agius 2018). "In the imaginaries of far-right populist and center-right movements, this rests on a political ideology that has as its core myth the homogenous nation—a romantic and gendered version of the homeland and homeland culture, both of which act as emotional resources in the appeal to ontological security" (Agius et al. 2020, p. 440; see also Kisić Merino et al. 2021). In the case of the far right, these fantasies often contain narratives of a secure, constant, and reminiscent past as contrasted to an anxiety-inducing present, a present that is often besieged by a fantasmatic projection of the 'other(s)', and "where women are singled out as the symbolic repository of group identity" (Kandiyoti 1991, p. 434). This narrative relies on fantasies of a 'natural' relationship between women and the nation (motherland, home, motherhood), with gender as a 'natural', essentialist dichotomous order (Saresma 2018), in which women act as figurative mothers of the nation-state (Mudde 2019). This relationship between gendered fantasy narratives, ontological insecurity, and the far right is particularly striking in the Indian case of Hindu nationalism and is intimately connected to narratives of pseudoscience: 'fake news', 'post-truths', and 'anti-science' claims.

Populist far-right politicians (from Trump to Bolsonaro to Modi and others)[2] have for years used relativist arguments to discredit overwhelming scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change, and the COVID-19 crisis has been accompanied with a veritable 'misinfo-demic' (WHO 2020). Hence, a number of extremist politicians have relied on 'truth-subversion' practices to discredit liberal elites, immigrants, and often women. "Anti-science is the rejection of mainstream scientific views and methods or their replacement with unproven or deliberately misleading theories, often for nefarious and political gains. It targets prominent scientists and attempts to discredit them" (Hotez 2021). This suggests that information can be presented in two ways and that each has equal value (CNN vs. the alt-right blog Breitbart, for instance), and relies on a belief that journalists, experts, and politicians are merely representing alternative views on the political spectrum (Kisić Merino and Kinnvall 2022). This signifies a form of emotional blame-shifting in which anxiety is turned into fear and aggression and where gendered fantasies stand out in terms of their nativist origins. It is particularly evident in the Indian case, where the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi has labeled all critique against the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis as anti-Bharat (anti-India), thus arguing that it is largely an "anti-Bharat conspiracy to create an atmosphere of negativity and distrust in the government" (Kaul 2021). Modi is portrayed here as ascetic, paternal, and efficient—a strongman protector of the Hindu nation—a theme that has deep resonance among the Hindu right, as discussed in the next section.

Gendered Fantasy Narratives: Hindu Nationalism in Varanasi and the Film Water

Before Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, Hindu nationalists were waging a battle against resistance movements in Varanasi in their attempts to control the narratives of women's bodies in Hindu religious discourse. In this context, Hindu nationalists' violence against the shooting of the film Water in Varanasi presents an interesting case study by providing the ideological background of Hindu nationalist ontological security-seeking practices and their resistance, while also bringing to the forefront the fantasy narratives of 'motherhood' at the center of Hindutva imaginaries. Located in North India, Varanasi is one of the most sacred places of Hindus, and it is also a highly revered seat of Brahmanical Hinduism. During the 15th and 17th centuries, and under the patronage of landlords, traders, and priest classes in Varanasi, Hindu high culture reinforced the superior position of Brahmins and other hierarchical relationships, including the subservience of women, through the public performance of Ramleela[3], Katha[4], and public recitations of Ramcharitmansa[5] (cited in Freitag 1989, p. 26). Due to these Brahmanical religious rituals and practices, the public sphere in Varanasi continues to be heavily dominated by the

discourse of 'Hindu orthodoxy' and Hindu Brahminic culture, leaving a narrow space for free, secular, and egalitarian thinking[6].

The film Water is based on the deplorable situation of Indian widows in the 1930s. It explores the exploitations of child widows by Brahmin priests in the 'widow shelters' in Varanasi and, upon its release, was an open challenge to the Hindu orthodoxy. The film was believed to hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindu community by depicting Hindu culture in a poor light and by demeaning the cultural heritage of Varanasi and India (*Outlook* 2022; Jakob 2006). Though the film script had been approved by the national censor board, protests erupted on 30 January 2000 by Hindu nationalist groups, such as Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the Kashi Sanskrit Raksha Sangharsh Samiti (KSRSS)—a social group directed by the RSS that was formed overnight which specifically targeted the director of the movie, Deepa Mehta (Phillips 2000; Khorana 2009). The protests soon turned violent, and when the filming started, the film crew was attacked, and the sets were destroyed. Here, it is important to note how Hindu nationalist ideology conceptualizes women as protectors of Hindu values and traditions rather than as individuals[7]. In the context of Water, it was also made clear that no matter what the suffering of Hindu widows, this topic should not be opened to public debate (Berglund 2011, p. 90). Depictions of child widows and prostitution challenged and offended the orthodoxy as these 'social evils' were presented as once being part of Hindu customs. Maligning the image of regressive social customs was thus seen as an attack on Hindu traditions by Hindutva proponents.

In this, Hindu sensitivity rests on the Brahmanical patriarchal system, which requires domestication (taming) of Hindu women for the system to be run smoothly—a purpose served by an inegalitarian Hindu nationalist ideology. Thus, for a Hindutva follower, a traditional Hindu woman is a fantasized conformist being (except sporadic examples of women scholars in ancient India), who must show unquestioned loyalties to her husband, family, and the Hindu nation. In the Hindu nationalist imagination, the landmass of India is framed as 'Bharat Mata', Mother India—a patriotic representation of the land in a divine female form. This depiction of India as a Hindu mother goddess has made it a religious duty for all Hindus to worship and protect the nation (Tharoor 2020; Kinnvall 2006; Anand 2011) and is also manifest in terms of how Indian womanhood is revered in the images of many Hindu female goddesses (Kali, Durga, Laxmi). As stated by the BJP spokesperson, Ashok Pandey:

> India is a land of Sita and Savitri . . . women are worshipped as a form of goddess . . . if you want to worship money, worship Lakshmi, if you desire knowledge, then worship Saraswati, Cow is considered our mother, Ganga is also considered our mother. (Tharoor 2020, p. 265)

In the Hindu nationalist fantasy, 'motherhood' is thus at the core of its imaginings—both as nation and goddess(es)—where the cow represents Mother Earth, as it is a source of goodness and its milk nourishes all creatures, while the river Ganges is a personification of the goddess Ganga. Krishna, a central Hindu deity, is often portrayed in stories recounting his life as a cowherd and referring to him as the child who protects cows (*Patheos* 2022). Hence, the Hindu nation/goddess remained untainted before the Hindu nation was conquered, violated, and raped by Muslim and Christian forces. This tendency to imagine the nation as 'pure' is always a gendered strategy related to men's control over women's bodies as women are considered to be defiled or tarnished by other men (Kinnvall 2006, p. 173; Kandiyoti 1991). Notions of community honor thus become contingent upon safeguarding women's sexual purity and domestic roles. As Jitendra Swami, an RSS-affiliated Hindu spiritual guru, asserts: "[T]here is a set model of a character in this country, as a daughter, sister, sisters-in-law . . . we cannot give sexual freedom to women" (quoted in Basu 1993, p. 30). Hindu majoritarianism thus propagates a 'macho-culture' that disregards women's individual agency and their right to make independent choices.

Here, a number of scholars have noted how women are ideally suited to the nationalist project (see, e.g., Sen 2014; Basu 1993), and how "nationalism singles women out as the

symbolic repository of kinship, motherland, or home" (Kandiyoti 1991). Hindu nationalism is thus similar to other nationalisms in its tendency to mythologize tradition and put the burden of old customs on women's shoulders. One important aspect of this longing to return to tradition concerns the resurrection of older forms of family organization and women's roles within them. In this, Hindu nationalism wants to bring back those times when women's sacredness was given importance, a theme associated with Hindu female purity where the female body becomes a site for claiming community homogeneity and order where women "are being re-inforced as essential subjects of the imagined *Hindu Rashtra*" (Bakshi 2020). This control of female sexuality, bodies, and reproduction is crucial to nationalism (Butler and Spivak 2010), in which women become the 'burden of representation' (Yuval-Davis 1997).

For Hindu nationalists, Hindu women thus have an active obligation to protect the nation, and Hindu motherhood plays a vital role in the creation of a Hindu nation. In fact, the role of women for sustaining Hindu nationalism is well-noted (Sen 2014; Banerjee 2012). The film Water hence challenged the Hindutva portrayal of female agency as pious. By portraying the undignified life of widowhood, the film raised critical questions on women's subservient role in the Hindu Brahmanical culture, thereby challenging the discourse of Hindu nationalism and its attempts to control women's bodies. The shooting of the film thus made Hindu nationalists 'ontologically insecure', generating an 'ontological crisis' by questioning the very premise on which 'motherhood' of Hindu nationalism stands. Therefore, the violent protests against the film's shooting can be considered a Hindutva crisis-response to maintain its control over women's bodies through ontological security-seeking practices that eliminate contesting narratives of Indian nationhood. To this day, the narrative of motherhood remains the primary site of female agency and political action in Hindutva ideology (Sen 2014). This became clear in the interviews conducted with individuals and groups resisting the Hindutva narrative. Not only did the interviewees emphasize the linkage between Hindutva fantasies of motherhood and that of patriarchy and the denial of women's rights, but they also clearly related this to violence and fears of critical thinking as a strategy to shutdown Hindutva identity. These are also themes that emerged during the pandemic, as explored later, where narratives of motherhood became connected to Vedic science as pseudoscience and the closing down of Hindutva in response to protest and critical thought.

Water: Fantasmatical Narratives of Hindutva and Their Resistance

A number of interviews were conducted with academics, artists, various NGO workers, and feminists who all resisted the hegemonic Hindu Brahminic culture in Varanasi, coming from all castes and religions. During the analysis of these resistance groups, three main themes emerged that illustrate the fantasmatical narratives of Hindutva and how resistance to Hindutva narratives took shape.

Theme 1: Water Challenged Hindutva Narratives of Patriarchy

Most of the respondents believed that the 'film set' was vandalized because it challenged Hindu patriarchy. One Hindu women activist believed the film set was attacked because it "*questioned the authority of Hindu patriarchy*", in which "*religion, patriarchy, and Brahminism support each other; if one falls, another will fall . . . people will start questioning their [Hindutva] hegemony . . . if women got empowered, their religion would be demolished*". Similarly, a Muslim female educationist and activist who actively coordinated the resistance movement perceived the vandalism against the film shooting as "*Hindutva attempt to silence progressive and feminist voices*", using "*violence and intimidation*", arguing that "*RSS and Shiv sena demolished the movie set because they find this film against their culture because [the] film shows poor condition of Hindu widows*". In this, she was asserting that all religions tend to oppose change when it comes to women's social reformation and that the RSS is patriarchal, enforcing the idea that women should be confined to their homes. "*[T]hey [RSS/Hindutva] want to impose strict dress-code on women; they have problems with women raising their voices*

[*against their oppression*], *they support widow burning and are in favor of keeping widows in poor situations*".

Many respondents also considered Hindutva ideology a serious threat to gender equality and secularism due to its patriarchal nature, where a woman's duty is to produce babies and become a good Hindu nationalist. "*Hindutva proponents do not want women to be educated, otherwise who will cook for them, if women got empowered their religion would be demolished*". Many of the interviewees also stressed that, within the Hindutva framework, a Hindu woman is denied making personal choices on issues of vital concern to her life: arranged marriages are preferred over love marriages, inter-caste marriages are despised, and Muslim men may be criminalized (known as a love-jihad) if married to a Hindu woman. This notion of inter-caste or cross-religious marriages link patriarchy to fantasmatic narratives of the 'nation as mother' (Bharat Mata), in which only pure Hindus (produced and reared by Hindu mothers) are to be considered true members of the nation.

Another respondent, a Christian priest, activist, and educationist, believed that Water was attacked because it did raise serious women's issues, such as "*forced prostitution of widows, child marriage, and their exploitation by the Hindu priests*", thus arguing that "*religion helps to sustain patriarchy since women follow and support regressive Hindu social customs*". Interestingly, most Hindu rituals promote patriarchy and women's subordination by confining them to a lower position in society. Festivals such as Karva chauth, Tij, and Bhaiya Duje require women to keep fasting for the male members of their family. Many such festivals and rituals are hence crucial for the transmission of religious heritage and cultural norms from generation to generation, thus strengthening a patriarchy sustained by the Brahmanical system and Hindutva proponents (Tewari 2007, p. 42). In contrast, this priest said that Varanasi is not just representing Brahmin culture, but it is also a city of composite cultures (Sanjha sanskriti) where dhobis (washermen), mochis (cobblers), and street vendors live. Here, it is important to note how Ganga-Jamuni tajeeb, or the mixed-culture of Varanasi, is known for its tolerance and inclusiveness (Upadhyay 2010). However, this Christian priest was also targeted by Hindutva proponents and was arrested during the Anti-CAA (Citizen Amendment Act) protests in 2019. Other respondents stressed how the "*film highlighted the nasty lives of Brahmins who claimed to live a pious life . . .* " and how the film showed "*a historical fact when child widows were exploited and Dalit women were tormented*". Hence, by creating violence against the film's shooting, RSS and Hindutva forces were trying to impose their narrative hegemony over the society—a form of social control that works as an ontological security-seeking practice in the face of resistance.

Theme 2: Hindutva Is Fundamentally against Women's Rights: Narratives of Good Motherhood

This control also extends to other choices of their lives, particularly to widows of all ages: "*they have made the rules for widows: what they shall eat; they were forbidden to use salt and garlic so they will not sexually get aroused, they have to wear white dress, had to shave their head . . . their food, lifestyle, dress, everything was controlled*"; furthermore, "*they must not look beautiful; they were treated like slaves*". The portrayal of widows in the film Water is similar to this respondent's narrative: widows in shelter houses had to live by the rules coded in the Manu-smriti, they had to shave their heads, wear white dresses, not eat sweets, and were not allowed to meet their male relatives. This is what Hindutva refers to as 'Hindu culture', where women are not allowed to make even the smallest decisions on their lives. "*Even, their 'thought process' are controlled by instructing them to keep themselves busy in the worship of god*". An ideal woman must be a good mother, daughter, or sister, and she must stay pure as the sacred Ganga. In traditional Hindu society, women were discouraged to study and work and denied property rights. Hindutva ideology, similar to other far-right ideologies, imposes this model of society on Hindu women. In this process of domination of women's bodies, Hindutva, as one respondent claimed, "*employs a selective reading of Smriti* [a body of Hindu text] *to validate women's lower position in the Hindu society*". In contemporary times, it invokes the nostalgia of this mythical past by contrasting a Hindu women's character with the Goddess Sita, the obedient wife Savitri and Sati. As Jitendra Swami, an RSS-affiliated

Hindu spiritual guru, lamented: "*even battles in Ramayana and Mahabharata were fought to save the dignity of the women, showing how much women were dignified*".

Such narratives are in line with the Hindutva ideology towards women. Violence against Water was thus an attempt by Hindutva forces to silence those challenging an unfair and unjust oppressive system. Most of the Hindutva proponents are also very critical of the human rights discourse, which is viewed as empowering women and making them challenge social dogmas and evil customs. In the words of one activist, "*Hindutva forces are afraid of [human rights] activism; they are afraid of critical thinking, they are afraid of being challenged*". Hindi media in Varanasi also provided coverage to Hindutva forces and ignored the resistance's protests, while the BJP state government was afraid to offend its core Hindu voters by allowing the film to be shot. Additionally, local Hindutva leaders saw this (opposing an anti-Hindu film) as an opportunity to polarize people—on the lines of Hindu versus foreign culture—to gain political benefits. In addition, the resistance movement—which consisted of city-educated elites—failed to connect and convince the semi-urban people of Varanasi that this film was for their own good. Hindutva forces were thus able to use imaginaries of a mythical past to stir feelings of ontological insecurity among the Hindu religious community. It did so by turning to fantasies of 'motherhood' to discard multiple 'forces of resistance'.

Theme 3: Resistance Is Possible

Protest in support of Water has galvanized anti-Hindutva forces who saw the attack on the film set and subsequent violent outbursts by the Hindu orthodoxy as an attack on the composite culture of Varanasi. Feminist NGOs and academic intellectuals co-related this incidence with the violation of women's rights and the curtailment of freedom of expression. They came out in support of Deepa Mehta, the director of the film, but found themselves fighting against Hindutva forces and the ruling Hindu government of the BJP. Actual resistance against Hindutva groups started when the film set was damaged; soon, a public forum, Sanjha Sanskriit Manch (Composite cultural forum), was formed, which tried to problematize the dominant culture of Varanasi, saying that it "*is a composite (syncritic) culture—not Brahmanical culture . . . culture is not monolithic, culture is not fossilized*". One protestor referred to the resistance as a 'civil society movement', supported by writers, artists, and academics " . . . *we were about 200–300 people, this was a small civil society movement with limited resources . . . RSS used religion to mobilize people, used religious symbols and aggressive nationalism that have made people support them*". Soon, resistance was unified, organized, and coordinated: "*whenever there was an attack by Hindutva forces, we went there to protest against them, we have organized protest and sit-ins against such forces*", asserting that, "*we want to tell the people of Varanasi that this is an attack on our composite culture and we shall raise our voices against such forces . . . they* [RSS] *are people who are doing mob lynching and love jihad*".

Despite personal attacks, threats of arrest, and discouragement by the local government and the police, resistance groups continued to participate in protest marches, sit-ins, and submitting petitions to the government. Local media, the police, and the administration stood by Hindutva groups, though, pressurized by the BJP state government: "*the government did not help in creating an environment for the film shooting . . . local media sensationalized their protest*". None of the political parties came to their support, not even those who were secular and socialist. The resistance movement also had limited resources and did not receive much support from the masses. Lacking the emotional discourse of Hindutva, which was able to mobilize on religious lines in a deeply religious society—using emotional narratives of motherhood—the protestors failed to connect with the masses.

RSS and Hindutva groups also have well-established networks to start riots (Brass 2005), which they employ to push their political agenda from time to time. However, as one protester claimed, "*against all odds, they fought well*", and the resistance resulted in feminist Delhi-based NGOs lending their support to the resistance movement. In addition, theater and arts organizations made people aware of the violence perpetrated by Hindutva

groups against the film crew. Hence, resistance in support of Water represented a struggle against oppressive fantasmatical Hindu customs which discriminate and dehumanize Hindu widows. However, resistance was also clubbed together with other issues of equal concern, such as safeguarding the composite culture of the city, freedom of expression, and secularism. Those who fought believed in religious pluralism, human rights, and gender equality. Through resistance, progressive and rebellious voices shared the cultural space of the city. Resistance thus meant different things for different struggling groups. For feminists, it was a matter of women's rights, for some it concerned freedom of expression and secularism, while for others, it was a struggle against 'untouchability' and 'manu-smriti' (the laws of Manu).

Although the resistance movement was not able to achieve its goal (as the shooting of the film was prohibited), its symbolic achievement was remarkable, and it led to a proactive discussion on less talked about sensitive issues, such as the exploitation of Hindu widows, and drew critical attention nationally and globally. Support for Water shows the possibility of resistance against hegemonic Hindutva, even in the most sacred of cities. Interestingly, in other parts of India, such as in Sabarimala, Kerala, women successfully gained entry into a Hindu temple by defeating Hindu orthodox forces (Karindalam 2019). In Maharashtra, the Shani Shingnapur temple lifted the ban on women's entry due to feminists' struggle for gender equality (*The Hindu* 2016). Such examples show how resistance against fantasmatical hegemonic discourses can be won by questioning ontological security-seeking practices that aim to shut down Hindutva.

Since the Water controversy, resistance against Hindu nationalism has continued in various parts of India. Before COVID-19 struck India in March 2020, the award wapsi[8] movement against Hindutva intolerance occurred in 2015, the Bhima Koregaon/Elgar Parishad[9] case/movement in support of Dalits' dignity took place in 2018, and the 2019 anti-CAA (Citizen Amendment Act) protests posed tough resistance against the Modi government's policy to demonize Muslims and to suppress Dalit resistance movements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers' protest to repeal the 'three bills' became a nightmare for the Hindu nationalist government. Along with it, voices of resistance emerged from intellectuals, journalists, ex-bureaucrats, and students against the Modi government in relation to mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's response to much of this resistance has been to suppress and discredit it as 'anti-national', while promoting daily pseudoscientific fantasy narratives of Hindu nationalism for dealing with the coronavirus. Of particular importance is the extent to which such pseudoscientific fantasies were based in narratives of motherhood and how they, during the pandemic, worked as ontological security-seeking practices in their connections to mythical pasts and ideological underpinnings, as outlined in the Water section. This is dealt with in the next two sections, which start with an overview of the resistance against the Modi government and then proceed to a discussion of Hindu nationalists' (in line with and beyond the Modi government) fantasmatic responses to the pandemic. These two sections are mainly based on newspaper materials and speeches, although some of the interviews are used to highlight the link between fantasmatic narratives of motherhood and Vedic science as pseudoscience.

Resistance during the Pandemic

The world's largest demonstration and probably the biggest protests in human history (as reported by *Time magazine*, Bhowmick 2021) started against the Modi government in August 2020. As a protest movement, it seriously challenged the Hindutva agenda of benefiting big corporates (such as Ambani and Adani corporate houses) at the expense of poor Indian farmers. The 2020–2021 farmers' protest, which triggered countrywide demonstrations, was against three farm acts passed during the pandemic by the Modi government in September 2020, without any serious debate or consultation. The government claimed that these laws would benefit the farmers, while farmers argued that they may lose their land to big corporations and encounter the loss of government subsidies. The farmers' protest

started in Punjab and Haryana but soon spread to other parts of India (Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Hyderabad) and attracted support and participation from all walks of people, from intellectuals to students, to ordinary people and national politicians. The protests not only galvanized support from farmers within India, but also drew international support, including American pop star Rihanna and Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg (Arvin 2021). Farmers, in some parts of Haryana and Punjab, even warned BJP leaders not to enter their villages, and protesting farmers jammed national highways and went to West Bengal to campaign against BJP in the state election. The victory of Mamata Banerjee against BJP in West Bengal represented a political resistance against a growing and hegemonic Hindu nationalism. The farmers' protest thus emerged as one of the largest symbols of resistance against the Hindu nationalist party.

Apart from large and organized resistance movements, there has been sporadic resistance by individuals and professionals in response to Hindu nationalist policies during the pandemic. The nature of such protests has been rejecting, denying, or questioning Modi's polices during the pandemic. Those who criticized the government's policies were penalized in various ways, however, from detention to framing sedition charges. Dissidents were charged under India's Epidemics Diseases Act, and the 2005 Disaster Management Act. Both provide for possible prison terms and fines. Numerous arrests of activists and scholars were carried out under the National Security Act (NSA), the Public Safety Act (PSA), and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) (Alam 2020). Complaints were filed against several journalists seen as being critical of the state's pandemic response, especially the manner in which lockdown was imposed.

Later, as a second wave of the pandemic engulfed India in April–May 2021, the number of COVID-19 deaths drastically increased and the demand for medical supplies and vaccines shot up. People and activists started posting desperate messages on social media asking for oxygen cylinders, hospital beds, and ambulances. Consequently, on twitter, hashtags such as #Modiresign, #ResignModi, and #DisasterModi went viral (Ittefaq et al. 2022). An online petition on Change.org collected more than a million signatures demanding Modi's resignation. Suddenly, public sentiments started to turn against the Modi government. In addition, constant critical coverage by international media set the public narrative against the Indian government, which consequently resulted in the lowest rating of Narendra Modi since he came into power in 2014 (Mukherji 2021). Rather than addressing the grievances of its people, the Modi government saw this as an attempt to malign its image. In response to this 'public narrative' of gloom and doom, the Modi government tried to silence dissent through various means.

Under the government direction, fifty-two critical comments from twitter were removed (*Asia News* 2021). Cases were filed against those asking for help on social media. The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, directed officials to take action under the National Security Act and seize the property of individuals who spread 'rumors' on social media, claiming that hospitals were struggling to maintain their oxygen supplies. In Delhi, however, due to the shortage of vaccines and the critique of Modi's vaccination strategy, the Aam Aadmi party (AAP) put up satirical posters, asking, "*Modiji, why did you send vaccines of our children to foreign countries?*". The Delhi police responded by arresting those who had put up the posters, most of them being auto rickshaw drivers, daily wage laborers, and unemployed people. The AAP party came to their support, and a wave of resistance against the government started on social media (Bhardwaj 2021). Suddenly, many people, including political workers and the Congress party leader, Rahul Gandhi, shared photo shots of concerned posters on their twitter handles, challenging the government to arrest them.

Interestingly, Indian courts also became part of the resistance against the Modi government, extending their support to dissenting voices. The Supreme Court instructed the government not to punish anyone criticizing the government on social media for the situation concerning the pandemic. The Madras High Court questioned the central government for not doing enough to prevent the pandemic and the Delhi High Court issued a notice of

contempt to the government for defying its order to supply adequate oxygen to more than forty New Delhi hospitals (Krishnan 2021). The Allahabad High Court in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, while holding the state accountable, equated the death of COVID-19 patients due to a lack of sufficient oxygen supplies in the hospitals as a 'criminal act and no less than a genocide' (*Asia News* 2021). In response to these criticisms (especially the lack of medical supplies—vaccines, hospital beds, oxygen cylinders), the Hindu nationalist government invoked a mythical imagination of Hindu lifestyles during ancient India when people were healthy and strong. A fantasy narrative was created, within which Hindu populist imaginings, such as the infallibility of indigenous medicines like cow dung and cow urine, were contrasted with modern Western medicine. Based on Hindu belief systems of 'Vedic science', these myths were pushed as a cure to modern diseases, such as the coronavirus. The next section discusses how, through the promotion of a particular kind of pseudo-science that takes 'motherhood' as its defining departure, Hindu populist imagination was being re-memorized and glorified in opposition to modern scientific knowledge.

Fantasy Narratives of Motherhood and Hindutva Pseudoscience

On 3 April 2020, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indian citizens to light a candle/torch for 9 min at 9 pm. Minutes later, social media flooded with posts about how this move would eliminate the coronavirus. The BJP leader S.A. Ramdas claimed that lighting candles as instructed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi would kill the coronavirus as the virus would die due to the heat produced by the candles (Bharati 2021a). Modi's in-tellectual supporters also made claims that traditional 'Shankkanaad' (blowing of the conch shell) could kill the virus (Mohapatra 2020). Modi and his supporters thus reproduced a particular kind of far-right populism—through Hindutva pseudoscience—that challenged the supremacy of modern science and affirmed the hegemony of Hindu cultural fantasies of a gendered 'glorious Indian past'. Hence, Modi's appeal to the public to stay at home for twenty-one days at the beginning of the pandemic made references to Bharat Mata, by connecting the motherhood of the nation to the fetus that stays in the mother's womb for nine months (Radhakrishnan 2020). "*One step out of your door, beyond the 'lakshmana rekha', can bring in this deadly disease to your home*" (Modi, in his address to the nation during lockdown, cited in *ibid*), where the 'lakshmana rekha' refers to events in the Ramayana in which the goddess Sita is not to venture beyond the lines drawn by Lakshmana, and when she does, is kidnapped by Ravana. In this blurring of modern and Vedic science, Modi himself has often remained the stern leader, leaving his associates to interpret his actions as evidence of Vedic superiority over Western knowledge and medicine (see Subramaniam 2021). Here, Sen (2020) argues that the fear of the disease has consistently resulted in the invocation of the mother goddess, described as 'Corona Mata'—the goddess of pestilence—who has the power to tame the disease. This goddess is not one, but several deities invoked as 'Amman' (a popular goddess in Tamil Nadu) and is there to heal the disease and provide ontological security at times of distress.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, funded by the BJP government, was also quick to re-telecast two mythological series from the 1980s during the lockdown, Ramayan and Mahabharat, whose epical contents form the basis of Hindutva politics. The series include characters in ornate costumes, fantastical creatures, and depictions of different gods, and emphasize female characters as being subservient to male ones and the glorification of masculinity (Devani 2020). In line with the analysis of Water, the series can be seen as a prime example of how, through a daily fix of entertainment, the government were to instill Hindutva values of Bharat Mata (Mother India) as the basis for pseudoscientific beliefs.

Narratives of pseudoscience rooted in Hindu nationalism have been on the rise since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. Modi's affirmation in 2014 that the transplantation of the elephant head of the god Ganesha to a human body was a great achievement of Indian surgery, reflects an attempt to recover the 'lost glory' of the Vishwa guru Bharat (Rahman 2014). It seeks to temper rational modern science with

Hindutva nostalgia of the superiority of the Vedic sciences, in which science and technology mediate mythological and divine worlds (Subramaniam 2021). Modi's mockery of science also paved the way for his supporters to narrativize a fantasy of Hindu pseudoscience in establishing the hegemony of Hindutva and polarize people on the lines of rational and religious modes of reasoning. Employment of pseudoscience thus acted as a way to deal with the 'ontological crisis' of Hindu nationalism during the turbulent times of the pandemic. Hindu nationalists invoked 'ontological security' by appealing to the nostalgic greatness of ancient Indian science to cure modern diseases, where the cow as mother (India) became an important ontological security-seeking practice for Hindutva nationalist fantasies.

Such mythical beliefs of Hindutva pseudoscience led the BJP science minister Harsh Vardhan in 2017 to fund research to validate the idea that *panchagavya*, a concoction that includes cow urine and dung, is a remedy for a wide array of ailments. During the pandemic, such Hinduized narratives of 'pseudoscience' took on a hegemonic form when BJP ministers—one after another—started to assert the benefits of cow dung and cow urine in curing and preventing the coronavirus. The BJP member of parliament Pragya Thakur asserted, for instance, that 'Gau-mutra ark' (cow urine extract) of a desi cow could prevent lung infection, claiming that she would use the 'gaumutra ark' every day and did not take any other medicine for the coronavirus (*The Free Press Journal* 2021). In another such incidence, the BJP Minister Usha Thakur claimed that performing 'Yagna Chikitsa' (treatment through Hindu offering rituals) could ward off a third wave of the virus and that adopting the Vedic lifestyle could serve as a protection from it (Bharati 2021b). Although doctors have dismissed such claims (Dave 2021), not only BJP ministers, but also their supporters and influential personalities discarded the efficacy of modern medical sciences over ancient Hindu medicinal knowledge.

The spiritual guru Ramdev blamed, for instance, allopathic medicine for coronavirus-related deaths, claiming that 'Coronil'—a product of his herbal pharmacy—could cure COVID-19 infections in seven days (Ray 2021). Interestingly, the Indian government, through its Ayush ministry[10] which promotes alternative medicines such as Ayurveda, granted a license to Coronil. However, doctors of the Indian Medical Association have challenged such claims and have taken legal action against Ramdev (Ani 2021). Ramdev also claimed that putting mustard oil through the nose would push the virus into the stomach where it would die due to acid (Roy 2020). In the BJP-ruled state of Gujarat, a forty-bed state hospital in a Goshala (cow shed) was treating COVID-19 patients with cow dung and urine while chanting mantras (Desai 2021). Patients were also covered by a layer of cow dung as part of the treatment. The sacredness of the cow—not least the cow as mother—has thus been reasserted as a symbol of growing Hindu nationalism. The idea that the cow's milk, dung, and its urine have healing and anti-septic properties and can cure any disease takes its inspiration from religious beliefs in Hindu cultural superiority over modern science. During the pandemic, a Hindutva cultural narrative was hence set in motion through the employment of the efficacy of Ayurveda, cow dung, urine, and other Hindu religious cultural properties and practices.

These Hindu cultural narratives were constructed to deal with Hindutva ontological insecurity to counteract growing dissatisfactions under the BJP government concerning its handling of the pandemic. In this context, when hundreds of people were dying on a daily basis due to the lack of oxygen, hospital beds, medicine, and vaccines, and with the Modi government failing to cater to their desperate needs, Hindutva was desperately seeking an ontological security—a fantasy cover—in pseudoscience in order to provide an immediate psychological healing to its Hindu citizenry. Here, it is important to note how Hindu nationalists not only believe in the supremacy of their race, but also in their cultural knowledge, such as Ayurveda and Vedic science. Ayurveda has been recognized as an alternative medicine but has not been accepted as a mainstream medical system by the Indian Medical Association or by the Western medical world. Hindu nationalists frequently cite herbal antidotes for modern diseases based on a nostalgia rooted in the superiority of

the Vedic knowledge (Subramaniam 2021; Radhakrishnan 2020). Though pseudoscience has been a pet-project of Hindu nationalists, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became a Hindutva tool to counteract bad publicity of the Modi government in the Western media. However, it can also be seen as a reaction to Hindutva's own ontological insecurity. The Modi government underestimated the disaster a pandemic could cause to the people, making Hindu nationalists' emotional call to employ Ayurveda or herbal medicines an attempt to hegemonize scientific narratives under the narratives of Hindu pseudoscience, in which mother goddess and Brahat Mata became one.

Interestingly, the popularity of such pseudoscience seems to be on the rise among Indian citizens, as recorded by google data[11]. Google searches for 'Coronil' went up significantly amid an unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases, showing how people were indeed influenced by the discourse of Hindutva pseudoscience. Hence, Hindu nationalists were able to nativize an 'ontological security crisis' (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) onto the promotion of Hindutva pseudoscience, which falsely provided some people with a sense of temporal ontological security. These Hindutva fantasy narratives are anchored in beliefs rather than logics and facts. By boasting of the antiquity of Indian medicine and its superiority, Hindu nationalist have sought to invoke a nostalgia about the glorious past when Bharat was vishava guru, and still can be. Hindutva 'pseudoscience' is thus yet another 'fantasy narrative' meant to establish its intellectual superiority and cultural hegemony. Nevertheless, resistance against Hindutva 'pseudoscience' has continued. Indian doctors have constantly warned people not to use cow dung to cure COVID-19 (Pleasance 2021). "There is no concrete scientific evidence that cow dung or urine work to boost immunity against COVID-19, it is based entirely on belief", said Dr. J.A. Jayal, president of the Indian Medical Association (*ibid*.). Senior scientists have also resigned over ignoring scientific data in dealing with the pandemic. Expressing their anguish, Indian scientist Swarup Sarkar lamented that "evidence and science were selectively neglected" (Financial Times 2021).

Alternative media[12] have persistently challenged the Hindutva fantasy narrative of pseudoscience, whereas citizens and intellectuals have resorted to Twitter and Facebook to criticize Hindu nationalists' attempts to impose such fantasies over the nation. Government responses to this resistance have been quick. A recent example can be found in the BJP government in the state of Manipur, which slapped the National Security Act (NSA) on journalists for Facebook posts that point out that cow dung or urine cannot cure COVID-19 (*The Indian Express* 2021). Many prominent intellectuals, fighting against superstition and pseudoscientific ideas and practices, have also been murdered by Hindu fundamentalists, including Narendra Dabholkar, a physician, and M.M. Kalburgi, a former vice-chancellor of Kannada University in Hampi (*ibid*.). Overall, the promotion of pseudoscience can be seen as another 'fantasy narrative' in the arsenal of Hindu nationalism to deal with the current 'ontological security crisis'. Invoking the therapeutic benefits of cow dung and cow urine to cure COVID-19 suggests that Hindu nationalists are seeking an ontological security within the fantastical imaginings of its indigenous traditions of motherhood. However, voices of resistance against it are also growing stronger, as the case of the film Water suggests, together with numerous protest movements during the last few years.

Conclusions

It is clear that Hindu nationalists employ a number of fantasy narratives in order to institutionalize their own hegemony and create a temporary narrative closure of ontological security—both to the movement itself and to the followers. The gendered implications of such fantasy narratives are particularly clear. Not only is India, or Bharat, viewed as a mother goddess, in which pious images of mythological women are held up to hail and revere, but also cows are similarly put on a pedestal of sacredness in their motherly features. Providing milk and nurturing generations of Hindus, the cows are portrayed along motherly lines of the sacred nation. Protests against these Hindu nationalist imaginings have encountered severe pushback from far-right Hindu nationalist groups as well as from

the BJP-led government, not least through cow vigilantism. For Hindu nationalists, Hindu women thus have an active obligation to protect the nation, and Hindu motherhood plays a vital role in the creation of a Hindu nation—a Bharat Mata. By promoting Hindutva pseudoscience in response to the ontological security crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Hindu nationalists have further relied on mythical Vedic knowledge to provide their movement and followers with a sense of temporal security and safety. The government's response to most of this resistance has been to suppress and discredit all resistance as 'anti-national' while promoting daily pseudoscientific Hindutva fantasy narratives of motherhood for dealing with both the film Water and the coronavirus.

Notes

1   Interview subjects were selected by consulting the local library in Varanasi. A documentary analysis was also conducted at the local library at Visesherganj and at a Benares Hindu university library. Crucial information about the film Water and the chain of events and persons involved in the controversy were gathered from the Hindi daily, *Daink Jagran*, a right-wing newspaper. Using the information from newspapers as a sampling frame, interviews were arranged, using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews also focused on subsequent issues of Hindu nationalist significance, such as cow vigilantism, love Jihad, and numerous communal riots under the Modi regime, as well as on reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher also observed socio-political discussions and engaged in informal chats in public spaces, such as tea stalls, public parks, and coffee houses, taking notes of relevant discussions of Hindutva politics, as well as of informal resistance to the current government's policies.

2   The popularity of Modi differs from many other far-right leaders, however, and the 'Mood of the Nation' survey conducted annually between 2016 and 2021 consistently listed Modi as the most popular prime minister among members of the public (India Today 2021).

3   Ramleela is the story of Ramayana (Hindu sacred book) performed in public.

4   Katha is a recitation of Hindu religious scriptures and rituals.

5   Written by Tulsidas, Ramcharitmanas is considered one of most scared book of Hindus, discussing ideals of society and setting the role models of all aspects of Hindu society.

6   Patronage of Ramcharitmanas activities from Ramlila to the katha is particularly explicable when seen not only as an auspicious act of charity, but also as an investment in the form of didactic instruction for the lower-caste residents of the city dominated by these power holders. See also (Lutgendorf 1989).

7   A current example of Hindu orthodoxy is violent protest against the entry of young women in the Sabarimala temple. Going against the verdict of the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of the entry of women in the Sabrimala temple in Kerala (South India), RSS and its affiliates waged a violent protest. In response, a large number of women formed a huge human wall (as a message of gender equality and women's empowerment) to support women's entry in the temple (see Vijayan 2019).

8   The 'award wapsi' movement in 2015 refers to when more than 50 writers returned their awards to protest alleged growth in intolerance under the Narendra Modi regime.

9   The 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence refers to violence during an annual celebratory gathering on 1 January 2018 at Bhima Koregaon to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon. The violence and stone pelting by the crowd on the gathering resulted in the death of a 28-year-old and injury to five others.

10   The Ministry of Ayush is a ministry of the Government of India, responsible for developing education, research, and propagation of indigenous and alternative medicine systems in India.

11   https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%203-m&geo=IN&q=coronil. Accessed on 5 January 2022.

12   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqZpp8jlvp0. Accessed on 7 March 2022.

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Article

Imagining the Post-COVID-19 Polity: Narratives of Possible Futures

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Abstract: The COVID-19 crisis is arguably the most important development of the 21st century so far and takes its place alongside the great eruptions of the past century. As with any crisis, the current pandemic has stimulated visions and proposals for post-COVID-19 societies. Our focus is on narratives—both predictive and prescriptive—that envisage post-COVID-19 political societies. Combining narrative analysis with thematic analysis, we argue that societal changes conditioned by the pandemic have accelerated a turn toward five inter-related developments: A renaissance in rationality and evidence-based science; a return to social equality and equity, including wage equity and guaranteed incomes; a reimagining of the interventionist state in response to crises in the economy, society, the welfare state, and social order; a reorientation to the local and communitarian, with reference in particular to solidaristic mutual aid, community animation, local sourcing, and craft production; and the reinvention of democracy through deep participation and deliberative dialogical decision making. The empirical focus of our work is an analysis of predominantly legacy media content from the *Canadian Periodicals Index* related to life after the pandemic and post-COVID-19 society.

Keywords: COVID-19; pandemic; media; narrative analysis; thematic analysis

1. Introduction

Alongside climate change, 9/11, the War on Terror, and the invasion of Ukraine, the pandemic that began in 2020 is a major defining event of the twenty-first century (Kinnvall and Singh 2022; Mahendran et al. 2022). Its impact equals, and perhaps will exceed, the seismic eruptions of the twentieth century: the Great Depression and the two World Wars. The world we thought we knew and the global order, which has been the basis of our collective and structured existences, have evaporated, and the direction of change and ultimate outcome remain to be determined.

It is challenging to find words to express the magnitude of what has happened. There is, of course, grave and abiding danger, which is often hidden or implicit, but there is also opportunity, renewal and revitalisation, and the sense of possibility that emerges in the context of the sudden necessity of doing things dramatically differently. From its earliest stages, the global pandemic put into place profound and thoroughgoing questions surrounding the existing social structure and the impact on polities (political societies). The global pandemic is almost entirely universal. It affects people throughout the world. It is deeply experienced in that most people have had their lives turned upside down through its impact—and more will in the future. It is a thoroughgoing undermining of routines and daily social and personal lives. Furthermore, it has had profound implications for material and economic life.

A vivid illustration of the disruptive and unprecedented characteristics of the pandemic may be found in the Canadian experience and, most recently, the events surrounding the Canadian convoy protests of the Winter of 2022 (Nasrallah 2022; Seto 2022). Mobilised,

funded, and organised by a loose coalition of anti-vaccine, alt-right, Christian right, white nationalist, and other anti-government elements, the convoy was ostensibly a protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates or restrictions, notably those at the Canada/US border. Sharing characteristics with Capelos et al.'s (2022) concept of *ressentiment*, the protesters demonstrated "moral victimhood, indignation, a sense of destiny and powerlessness" (Capelos et al. 2022). Through coordinated action, it evolved into a series of blockades and occupations, including a large encampment of trucks and temporary structures immediately outside the federal government buildings in Ottawa.

Disavowed by organised labour as well as the Canadian Trucking Alliance, the occupiers made use of industrial sirens and horns, as well as a forthright and occasionally menacing co-presence, to claim public space and attention, while also injecting a carnival atmosphere into the events as an attempt to claim legitimacy as a peaceful protest. Informed by media exposure to right-wing media outlets, such as Fox News, as well as a range of social media conspiracy sites, the predominant orientation toward the legacy or mainstream media (that is, the mass media of established and corporate print-based newspapers, broadcast television, and radio) was one of deep distrust and hostility, resulting in the physical harassment and intimidation of working journalists (Fenlon 2022). The general trend of opinion polls conducted demonstrated that approximately two-thirds of Canadians opposed the objectives and tactics of the occupiers, while about one-third supported them (Abacus Data 2022; Angus Reid 2022).

Our focus in this article is not on the Canadian convoy protests, whose presence here is simply to illustrate through sharp contrast the generally liberal and pluralistic orientations of the mainstream media sources that are the basis of our investigations. These progressive narratives stand in sharp contrast to the reactionary counter-narratives of the Canadian convoy protests. We concentrate on the writings of the mainstream or legacy journalists, along with the invited opinion leaders, who reflected upon and expressed their proposals and visions for the post-COVID-19 polity. For the Ottawa occupiers, these constitute the enemy, the much-derided mainstream media. Very few of the professional journalists or commentators that we referenced supported the reactionary, ultra-libertarian, seditious, or insurgent demands of the occupiers. Instead, their views of the post-COVID-19 polity were either broadly progressive or, as might be anticipated, mainstream and neutral, in the sense of conforming to existing metanarratives of liberal capitalist political society. In brief, while the occupiers looked backward in their counter-narrative frameworks, with a "make Canada great again" theme, the orientation of most journalists and commentators in our study was forward looking, imagining possibility, and assessing probability. In fact, of the 228 sources that were the basis of our study (see methodological details below), 92 of them (40.4 percent) were broadly progressive, 112 were neutral in tone (49.1 percent), 19 (8.3 percent) were unclassifiable, and only 5 (2.2 percent) could be described as reactionary. In other words, there is an almost neutral or progressive character to Canadian journalism and commentary when it comes to envisaging the post-COVID-19 polity.

The principal research aim of our study is exploratory. Through an analysis of relevant themes, in which we blend our own research expectations with an analysis of the data, we aim to portray the ways in which the Canadian legacy media have constructed narratives of the future in conceptualising the post-COVID-19 polity. As social scientists, we do not predict outcomes, particularly when the conditions of the present are so complex, novel, and multifaceted. What we aim to do is to identify evidence of existing trends and tendencies in the current period of transition and upheaval and extrapolate from them. We agree with Sools (2020) that in analysing how the future is imagined, we better understand what motivates and guides ideas and agency in the present. We do not know, and currently cannot know, the outcome of the many deep and complex forces at play in global economies, cultures, and polities, all aimed at marshalling and regulating the immediate necessities of life in western societies under the threat of the global pandemic.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

In their reflections on the pandemic and the need for political change, Chomsky and Polychroniou (2021) suggest that neoliberalism, the essential form of capitalist logic that has dominated in the West since the early 1970s, has left contemporary global society ill-prepared for any increase in demands now being made on welfare and wellbeing. The entire system of production, distribution, and exchange has undergone massive strain and stress, which the system experiences through the labour process, labour markets, and the distribution of resources. We would add that the stresses have been cultural and political as well as economic, and that polities are beginning to witness the impact of transformative change. As with all transformations on this scale involving the fate of broadly democratic polities, one can detect both dangers and opportunities. It is possible to see in the current circumstances the seeds of tyranny, authoritarianism, and despotism, on the one hand, or a revitalised pluralism and a more equitable democratic system, on the other hand. Our analysis of Canadian narratives may be situated in a broader global analysis of progressive and reactionary visions of the polity in the COVID-19 era, in particular the European-based research on affective politics and the impact of ressentiment (a complex emotional construct of aggression, grievance, bitterness, victimhood, shame, envy, and frustration) as a reactionary response toward the progressive values of the New Social Movements, notably social equity, feminism, multiculturalism, and diversity (Capelos et al. 2021, 2022; Capelos and Demertzis 2022; Verbalyte et al. 2022).

So, are we at some turning point in history? Is there potential for the rise of new ways of thinking about social structure, perhaps even the growth of social movements focusing on more egalitarian visions of the future? (Mahendran et al. 2022; Squire 2022). Will we simply return to the pre-pandemic state (Carr 2020) brought about by the pre-existing social forces and dominant ideologies? Or do we see the seeds of a turn to reactionary politics, a politics of resentment and ressentiment? Grounded in our own past research (Nesbitt-Larking 2007), our experience of living attentively through the pandemic, and reading the limited scholarship on expectations of or aspirations toward changes in the post-COVID-19 polity since the onset of the pandemic, we believe that the societal changes conditioned by the global pandemic have accelerated a societal turn toward five inter-related developments: (1) rationality and science, (2) social equality, (3) the interventionist state, (4) the local and communitarian, and (5) the deeply participative.

2.1. Rationality and Science

The pandemic has rapidly and profoundly revealed the critical importance of evidence-based and scientifically grounded information as well as the need for rationality and systematic order in the provision of public health and other services (Carnegie Civic Research Network 2021; Pleyers 2020; Teovanovic et al. 2021; Zinn 2021a, 2021b).

In the contemporary world of post-ideological and post-structural openness, in which social media have increasingly become forums of toxic disinformation and post-truth rationalisations, populist leaders and movements, such as the Canadian convoy protests, have been able to dominate through bluff, bullying, and deception (Baron 2018; Bruckman 2022; Kinnvall and Singh 2022; Seargeant 2022). They simply make up plausible-sounding responses to any situation, stigmatise and marginalise enemies, deflect attention, distract with absurdities, downplay realities, and denigrate the opposition. For a time, regardless of how ill-informed and incapable the populist leader or movement is, these techniques are functional. Those raising criticism are accused of self-interested bias, drawing upon "fake news", failing to express the correct appreciation, or simply exhibiting bad manners for daring to question the existing "reality". However, the global pandemic cannot be dismissed or explained away with bluff and bully tactics, and populist leaders cannot claim to be experts in it for long. Their fraudulent posturing and inadequate floundering soon become clear to all those who are able to see, even perhaps reluctantly and fitfully, some of their core supporters.

In terms of the polity, this speaks to the resurgence of science and rationality, of the systematic use of evidence and reason in the conduct of human affairs, from pure science to applied science, to epidemiology and public health administration. In such circumstances, public health regimes, pandemic preparedness, universal medical provision, rational systems designed to enhance aggregate public wellness and reduce sickness, as well as a clean environment, become matters of enlightened self-interest for all, including those who currently stand to lose status, privilege, and economic advantage through the changes that are needed to introduce such developments. Given the importance of rationality and science, we anticipate their presence in the post-COVID-19 narratives we investigate.

2.2. Social Equality

In certain respects, the spread of highly contagious viruses in a series of interconnected hotspots has necessarily flatlined the social structure and social order. No matter one's status, class, wealth, ethnic identity, or caste, the human body is equally vulnerable to infection and transmission, giving rise to the populist name of the "great equaliser". However, as Ann Phoenix (2022) points out in her contribution to this special issue, no crisis of this kind is ever experienced equally across demographic groups. To begin with, ethno-racial minorities, the poor, women, and the aged are predisposed through their existing life circumstances to be at greater risk of further ill health. Added to this, frontline workers—those at greatest risk—are disproportionately working class, racialised, women, and the marginalised (Golden and Muggah 2020). As the pandemic has grown and inoculations have become available, the capacity to protect, isolate, and quarantine has become more greatly differentiated, and inequalities have been further exposed and aggravated. It is then clear that the poor, those in blue-collar and working-class occupations, women, and ethnic minorities have been disproportionally affected by the pandemic (Green et al. 2021; Romel 2020).

Attempts to predict the precise changes of the new global order are premature, but what we can say with some certainty is that the pandemic has revealed both locally and globally a series of worsening socio-economic inequalities and widening socio-economic and socio-cultural fault lines (Clark et al. 2020; Ferreira et al. 2021). The: "COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the already marginalized groups in our societies" (Ali et al. 2020, p. 416) and societies have experienced ever greater economic, gender, racial, and age-based inequalities (Dang and Nguyen 2021; Deaton 2021).

One consequence is the calling into question, perhaps even the undermining, of certain hitherto taken-for-granted structures and ideals, among them acquisitive individualism, environmental destructiveness, and indifference toward the local community (Van Barneveld et al. 2020). The poor, including the working poor, have become less well-off and, at the same time, the gap between nations is widening, as economic disparities between countries grow, resulting in a contemporary economic and social world increasingly separated and segregated by the effects of the pandemic (Ahmed et al. 2022; Ali et al. 2020).

The pandemic has not only exposed inequalities within countries, but it has also brought into sharp focus differences between countries (Hilhorst and Mena 2021). The position of developing societies, with poorer, less established economies and often reliant on immature health systems ill-prepared to deal with the pandemic, has especially been exposed (Haldane et al. 2021; Shadmi et al. 2020) as socio-political divisions continue to be amplified by the pandemic (Muldoon et al. 2021). Many of these nations are also facing huge losses of revenue from tourism (Gössling et al. 2021) alongside collapsing export revenue and record levels of debt, causing the World Bank to suggest that the pandemic had led to a "tragic reversal" in development (Elliott 2021). There has been a move in some societies towards greater egalitarianism, with generalised beliefs that when it comes to wages and income and social equality, polities should reduce disparities and inequities. This may incorporate criticism of neo-liberalism and the free market (Child 2021; Gaynor

and Wilson 2020). We would anticipate seeing some of these suggestions and visions in the journalistic narratives we investigate.

2.3. The Interventionist State

While the pandemic cannot be seen to bring about more egalitarian political societies (in fact, circumstances might have worsened through the revelations of structured inequalities laid bare by the crisis), the impact of the changes that have been necessitated through a coordinated response have been equalising, sometimes deliberately so. Those in power have been faced with workers taking time off due to illness, and in fear for the continued stability and viability of regimes faced with the prospects of a dramatic decline in legitimacy and civility.

Under such conditions, the state has been left with little option but to extend welfare provisions and a range of benefits. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realms of medicine, health, welfare, and social security. The required response—to ensure the good-enough health and wellbeing of all citizens in order to limit the spread of the virus and to buttress system integrity—has been to massively redistribute wealth and resources in order to avoid social disorder, widespread public suffering, and socio-economic disruption (Turner 2020).

Among the central object lessons of the global pandemic has been the widespread return to the strong and coordinated state as the only institutional structure capable of steering a rational and viable response to the emerging crisis. Countries have rapidly rediscovered the principles and practices of the Weberian legal-rational state, with an emphasis on meritocracy, professional staff, chains of command, bureaucratic coordination, the rule of law, a reduction in civil liberties, and compulsory orders, backed if necessary, by force. This is the interventionist state that steers political society from potential breakdown and disorder to an orderly and utility-maximising coherence.

The policy arena of greatest immediate importance in this respect is public health, and the pandemic has accentuated calls for greater equality of provision. As Vin Gupta (in Rasheed 2020) says: "People across the globe will use COVID-19 as a strong justification to demand universal healthcare". Global experiences of fear and insecurity and the pandemic-related worsening of conditions have conditioned many citizens to return to the coordinated interventionist state as a framework to furnish physical security, while deeper connections to ontological security have been shifting from faith in the charismatic leader, and exclusivist, essentialist conceptions of nation, religion, and gender toward selves that are secured through coordinated and expert leadership, and open, inclusive conceptions of an interconnected global order in which distinctions of nation, belief, and gender are less salient.

Certainly, a series of populist leaders and movements have attempted to re-invigorate essentialism, exclusivism, nativism, and racism (Agius et al. 2021). This includes the Canadian convoy protests, where the proximate rallying cry was against vaccine mandates themselves. However, such bids are decreasingly effective. Closing and reinforcing borders flies in the face of a pandemic which is clearly global in scope. Any rational solution to it will also need to be global in scope. The necessary curtailment of international travel might appear to re-enforce populist messages of wall-building and isolationism. Ironically, however, the Canadian protesters have built their case against vaccines on opening international borders, at least to those who refuse to declare their vaccination status.

There are calls for state intervention to protect and enhance the social wage through bolstering those parts of the economy essential to life, notably health, employment, housing, education, and basic income support. This involves a major cultural shift, placing a different set of values at the heart of the economy and society and reaffirming the dignity of socially necessary labour as well as care for those unable to work. State intervention is also called for to support the economy and social order. Widespread uncertainty, fear, and anxiety have reawakened the state as the more or less legitimate guarantor of law and order (British Academy 2021; Haug et al. 2020; International Monetary Fund 2022; MacFarlane 2021).

Such calls for an enhanced, or at least reinvigorated, state are anticipated as elements of the post-COVID-19 narratives we investigate in the legacy media sources.

2.4. The Local and Communitarian

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen a turn to the local, the familial, the communitarian, the known, and the familiar as locations of support. The footprint of the neighbourhood has widened and deepened. Exhortations at the municipal, provincial, and federal orders of the Canadian government have stressed the need to stay within walking distance of home, to support local businesses, and to celebrate the closeness of family and community bonds. The onset of second-order catastrophes in Canada, such as the Nova Scotia mass murders or the floods in northern Alberta, have redoubled community-affirming and supporting energies across the country. There has been a reaffirmation of the notion of community, resting on notions of solidarity and mutual aid. Here, the state takes a diminished or perhaps a complementary role. Individuals and small groups are recognised, affirmed, encouraged, and enabled to organise support and care within their local communities. The most ambitious projection of this for the future sees the emergence of renewed cultures of fraternity and solidarity (Alderden and Perez 2021; Alalouf-Hall and Grant-Poitras 2021; British Academy 2021; Christens 2012).

The implications of suddenly sending massive workforces of hundreds of millions of people from centralised offices, shops, and factories back into their homes, which are then more or less instantly retooled as remote and networked workplaces, are widespread and profound. This is not to mention the closure of schools and the quarantining of vulnerable populations in isolation. This is a radical acceleration of the twenty-first century version of putting out and homework as women in particular struggle to adapt to the new realities of juggling work and domestic labour.

At a minimum, this leads to a dramatic rethinking of the nature of work and the workplace, as well as work-life balances, notably childcare and responsibility for domestic labour. It also immediately raises issues of equity when it comes to access to the tools—bandwidth, software, and hardware devices—needed to conduct the multi-tasking work of the everyday in the physically distanced and separated world. The new normal carries with it all the advantages and disadvantages of domestic labour and dependent care, the convenience and flexibility as well as the humanisation of life-work balances, but also the breakdown of boundaries around work tasks, the 24/7 job, demands for availability, and the stigmatisation associated with opening the homes of poor and marginalised people to greater scrutiny.

As Peter Lunn notes: "This pandemic is far from a war, but it requires pulling together. And when people realise what collective action can achieve, it could change how they relate to others, resulting in a greater sense of community" (Rasheed 2020). The socio-political consequences of this are open and relate to the two sides of McLuhan's global village concept: the inclusionary and the exclusionary. It is certainly the case that by driving us increasingly to the familiar, the fine-grained, and the local, we enhance and strengthen our shared humanity, notably through the shared networks of cyberspace. In this sense, what is local and familiar may be generalised into a shared universal humanity. However, it is also plausible that current circumstances may drive some further toward parochialism and particularism, stigmatising, hounding, and excluding those deemed unfit or outsiders. The dark side of community and the separated family bubble also carries with it the threat of increased domestic stressors and violence, and there is evidence of a rise in rates of anti-women domestic violence (Gunraj and Howard 2020).

The threat of the global pandemic has dramatically restricted travel, notably airline travel but also, in many cases, local and regional travel. Apart from the obvious impact on the travel and tourism industries, each of which looks set to undergo dramatic transformation, there is a turn to local travel and tourism, from the footsteps that each of us may take from our places of residence as we visit local places to the development of the "staycation" industries in the future. This links with a growing environmental sensibility

that mega cruise liners and jumbo jets are environmentally unsound and are generating unsustainable problems for the planet. Associated with this is a forced rethinking of the food supply chain and perhaps an accelerated awareness of the importance of locally sourced food and plant-based food. Among the sources under consideration in our study, we anticipate references to the local and communitarian with respect to narratives of the post-COVID-19 polity.

2.5. The Deeply Participative

The role of the state and community animation has reawakened tendencies toward participative and deliberative democratic structures in society, with greater input of local societal and economic choices in decisions surrounding social spending and budgetary allocation and greater grass-roots democracy. (Child 2021; Greitens 2020; Mendes 2020; Saad-Filho 2021) In many ways, the responses to the global pandemic have conditioned a renewed and enriched participation in public life. At the very least, even minimal scanners have been obliged to "pay attention", if only for purposes of self-preservation. But there is an overall sense of involvement, commitment, and responsibility on the part of many. This has been conditioned by the widespread requirement for collective action for the general wellbeing of the community. Under such circumstances, each of us is called upon to be mindful, active, and engaged, if only to "do our bit" by staying in quarantine, maintaining physical separation, using face covers, or otherwise following the rules. We expect to see consideration of democratic structures and processes in the narrative sources investigated.

3. Methodology

In order to explore these views, our approach combines thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2012; Butler-Kisber 2018) with narrative analysis (Andrews 2013; Andrews et al. 2000; Andrews et al. 2018; Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Narratives are often stimulated or catalyzed at points of tension, stress, or trauma in order to make sense of rapidly changing or unstable lived experience. Narratives are constructed in history, social structural context, and in constant community with others through circulation, amplification, repetition, and dialogue. Thematic analysis generates a range of methods for sorting and classifying according to themes identified in text and talk. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), our thematic analysis blends our own theoretical expectations regarding post-COVID-19 polity narratives with an inductive approach to the data. Both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) characteristics of our textual data have informed the sorting, coding, and development of the themes.

To test our expectations and to assess how far they explore the themes and perspectives of narratives that were operational in the COVID-19 period, we ran a database search of the *Canadian Periodicals Index* (CPI) from 29 February 2020, to 31 July 2021. The CPI covers over 17 million articles from over 1500 Canadian newspapers, magazines, and journals in English and French. This includes some Canadian editions of foreign-based publications. About 800 of the periodicals are available in full text from 1983 to the present. The emphasis is on current events, culture, the arts, technology, business, and commentary.

We searched a series of terms across the CPI search engine, using a keyword search, related to "Covid", "Pandemic", and "Coronavirus". The terms are listed in Table 1 below. We then scanned each of the 2227 full-text articles that were generated from that search from news sources, magazines, and academic journals, excluding those that were duplicates, fewer than 300 words in length, and those written in French. From the initial output of 2227 articles, we also excluded those that were overtly and clearly not related to narratives concerning the post-COVID-19 polity. This resulted in a final corpus of 228 articles, or just over 10 percent of the original number. Using the discourse analytical software programme, NVivo, we then coded the 228 articles into a series of nodes, which are presented in Table 2 below. The resulting nodes generated the illustrative narrative materials that we draw upon in the substantive sections of the article. As we shall demonstrate, our anticipated narrative themes were generally present across the sources, thereby supporting our theory-

driven deductive expectations. The most striking inductive (data-driven) outcomes of the study were the distinctions between predictive and prescriptive content among the narrative materials describing the post-COVID-19 polity. In our original theorisation of post-COVID19 narratives, we had not anticipated this distinction. Scrutiny of the data made it apparent, and we decided to code according to the distinction. Case 86 (see the Data Sources for a key to numbered sources in the database) illustrates a predictive narrative:

> The crisis has also revealed government's ability to provide solutions, drawing on collective resources in the process. A lingering sense of "alone together" *could* boost social solidarity and drive the development of more generous social protection down the road.

Case 105 demonstrates a prescriptive narrative approach:

> For years social spending has favoured the elderly and an outdated safety net. It *should* be rebuilt around active labour-market policies that use technology to help everyone.

The columns of Table 2 specify both sources (individual articles) and references (extracts of text from articles that express predictions and/or prescriptions related to our study). The number of sources exceeds 228 because some articles had multiple codes into a range of themes. Predictions and prescriptions that did not describe the post-COVID-19 polity were coded into the generic category "Other". For example, several sources concerned travel and tourism trends/destinations or business sales trends and preferences after the pandemic. While of interest, these were not of direct relevance to our study.

Table 1. Canadian Periodicals Index Keyword Search (29 February 2020–31 July 2021).

SEARCH TERM	NEWS MEDIA	MAGAZINE	ACADEMIC JOURNAL
Post Covid	1001	103	4
Post Pandemic	887	121	15
Post Coronavirus	51	2	3
Life After Covid	17	3	1
Life After the Pandemic	4	1	0
Life After Coronavirus	2	1	0
The World After Covid	2	4	0
The World After the Pandemic	0	5	0
TOTALS [GRAND TOTAL = 2227]	**1964**	**240**	**23**

According to the data in Table 1, the mainstream Canadian news media contained substantial materials on the post-COVID-19 polity, and that the term "Covid" was preferred over the earlier term "Coronavirus", which has now fallen out of use. As can be seen, the term "pandemic" was a close second in terms of references to the potential for future developments. It is also understandable that attention to the post-COVID-19 polity was limited in academic sources, as academic research typically takes longer to conduct, peer review, and publish.

The data in Table 2 permits an initial examination of the extent to which the narratives of the post-COVID-19 polity found in the CPI search correspond to the theoretical or deductive (Braun and Clarke 2006) themes we identified earlier. As illustrated earlier, following our inductive thematic analyses, we observe that conceptualisations of the post-COVID-19 polity fall into two broad categories: those that predict or speculate about the future, often in neutral terms, and those that take a stand and make prescriptive judgments concerning the future.

Table 2. Nodes and Number of References Derived from Sources (NVivo).

NAME	SOURCES	REFERENCES	SOURCES	REFERENCES
	PREDICTIVE	PREDICTIVE *	PRESCRIPTIVE	PRESCRIPTIVE *
Rationality and Science	6	7 (87.5) [2.4]	1	1 (12.5) [0.7]
Social Equality	18	24 (43.6) [8.2]	20	31 (56.4) [22.5]
Wage Equity and Guaranteed Income	3	3 (21.4) [1]	9	11 (78.6) [8]
Interventionist State—Economy	9	14 (53.8) [4.8]	9	12 (46.2) [8.7]
Interventionist State—Order	8	10 (76.9) [3.4]	2	3 (23.1) [2.2]
Interventionist State—Welfare State	10	11 (26.2) [3.8]	18	31 (73.8) [22.5]
Local and Community	31	44 (78.6) [15]	6	12 (21.4) [8.7]
Local Sourcing and Craft Production	15	18 (81.8) [6.1]	3	4 (18.2) [2.9]
Deep Democracy and Participation	4	8 (100) [2.7]	0	0 (0) [0]
Environmental	8	16 (61.5) [5.5]	9	10 (38.5) [7.2]
Global and Cosmopolitan	9	13 (61.9) [4.4]	6	8 (38.1) [5.8]
Spiritual/Philosophical	9	14 (51.9) [4.8]	10	13 (48.1) [9.4]
Other	99	111 (98.2) [37.9]	2	2 (1.8) [1.4]

* Row percentages for references given in round brackets; column percentages for references given in square brackets.

As is clear in Table 2, most of the references (over 55 percent) are predictive, but there are also a substantial number of narratives that are prescriptive. When it comes to prescriptive narratives, our classification and that of CPI contributors is close. Among the data, one feature that stands out is the dominance of the prescriptive voice used in narratives concerning broadly social justice issues, notably wage equity and the desirability of the welfare state. Conversely, those narratives focused on community and working from home tend toward the predictive end, and there are relatively fewer prescriptive narratives in these categories.

Using the number and percentage of references as our guide it is clear that in general terms, the journalists and commentators writing across Canadian periodicals have conceptualised the post-COVID-19 polity according to similar criteria as those we outlined. Specifically, when it comes to the prescriptive there are few that we did not also consider. A rough guide to the degree of correspondence with our initial five themes is attainable by summing the number of predictive and prescriptive references in each thematic area and then expressing them as a percentage. As the two references columns indicate, there is a total of 431 references. In terms of our initial themes, the percentage correspondences are as follows: (1) rationality and science (1.9 percent), (2) social equality (16 percent), (3) the interventionist state (18.8 percent), (4) the local and communitarian (18.1 percent), and (5) the deeply participative (1.9 percent). The remaining substantively coded themes (Environment, Global and Cosmopolitan, and Spiritual/Philosophical) make up 17.2 percent, and the other category makes up 26.2 percent.

Of the five deductive or theoretical themes we conceptualised, three receive substantial coverage in the post-COVID-19 narratives derived from the CPI search. These are: social equality, the interventionist state, and the local and communitarian. There are very few references to either rationality and science or the deeply participative. One possible explanation for this is that such concepts and themes are relatively theoretical and abstract and, thereby, do not lend themselves as readily to journalistic coverage. Of the few references in these categories, almost all of them come from two of the more serious political periodicals, the Canadian edition of *The Economist* and *Foreign Affairs*, which are also referenced in the CPI.

The remainder of the article now turns to a discussion of our findings with respect to each of the five themes.

4. Discussion

When it comes to the issues of rationality and science, as noted earlier, they do not appear to be very prominent in the narratives regarding the post-COVID-19 polity. Of the small number of references to rationality and science, Frances Fukuyama in Case 86 adopts a similar view to our own: "The practical realities of handling the pandemic favor professionalism and expertise; demagoguery and incompetence are readily exposed. This should ultimately create a beneficial selection effect, rewarding politicians and governments that do well and penalizing those that do poorly" (Case 86). In Fukuyama's post-COVID polity-19, rational choices in the political marketplace lead to optimal public policy choices.

Others conceptualising this theme refer to connections between recognition of the pandemic and support for climate change measures, the role of churches in combatting disinformation, the role of technology in post-COVID-19 polities, and what Bratton (2021) calls "the revenge of the real". The following prescription by Danielle Allen brings together an aspiration for scientific rationality with a call for civic literacy:

> The United States needs science. It needs technological innovation, and it needs scientists to advise elected leaders. But that is not all the country needs. It also needs people who can interpret the science and make judgment calls that take broader factors into account. The U.S. government's growing investments in scientific education have been accompanied by reductions in funding for civics education . . . And the country is paying for it now. In the United States today, the art of governance is, at best, on life support. Paradoxically, Trump has delivered the best civics lesson in generations. Thanks to his impeachment trial, Americans have had to think about the proper bounds of executive power, the checks offered by the legislative and judicial branches, and precepts of the Constitution. Thanks to his failure to govern through this crisis, many have learned for the first time just how the United States' federal system is supposed to work. If the country's constitutional democracy is to have a healthy future, Americans should finish this crisis intending not only to invest in health infrastructure but also to revive civics education. (Case 88)

This narrative of a post-COVID-19 future places science and rationality at the centre of expectations for the American polity and offers the vision of a society that is only healthy with the necessary investments in both the natural and social sciences.

As detailed earlier, the crisis has revealed the perceived injustices and inefficiencies of low wage levels for critical workers, many of whom are racialized minorities and women. The concept of a universal basic income has made a comeback into public discourse (Maclean's 2020), alongside more generalised calls for greater income and wealth equality. Predictions of and calls for greater socio-economic equality as well as wage equity are prominent among the references listed in Table 2 and constitute a dominant theme among contributors to public deliberations as they envisage the post-COVID-19 polity. Hopes and expectations regarding wage equity are for a universal basic income, economic dignity, notably for front-line workers, reductions in disparities in income and wealth, better bargaining rights, and improvements in working conditions in a post-COVID-19 polity.

When it comes to social equality, the narrative threads incorporate racialised, gender, and more general disparities and the opportunity to address them in a post-COVID-19 world. This includes calls for the intergenerational redistribution of wealth, improvements for front-line workers, improvements in housing, health care, food security, and access to the arts, culture, and education, including access to digital resources.

As illustrated in Case 203, Toronto author and social justice activist, Rusul Alrubail, and her colleagues develop prescriptive narratives of improvements for marginalised workers. As they argue, the pandemic has turned the spotlight on a number of important issues facing workers, such as inadequate health and safety conditions, the alarming rise of precarious work, and the need for a living wage. These issues disproportionately affect vulnerable workers, including women, racialized people, and other equity-deserving groups that comprise a high percentage of the labour force in some of the hardest-hit sectors (Case 203).

The predictive narratives also contain warnings about the post-COVID-19 polity should certain trends continue or grow. These include the challenges of inflation and the cost of living, the failure to address the working conditions of precarious workers, and growing socio-economic inequality. In a further illustration of these themes, this extract envisions the nature of economic dignity in a post-COVID-19 polity, regarding it as the attainment of material sufficiency and the absence of desperation, the wherewithal to build lives that go beyond survival, which incorporate self-actualisation, and the capacity to freely engage as a worker, consumer, and citizen:

> Gene Sperling, economic policy chief under Clinton and Obama, says economic dignity should be "the ultimate goal of [post-Covid] economic policy". He says it [consists of] the following three pillars: "The ability to care for family without economic deprivation or desperation"; "the capacity to pursue potential and a sense of purpose and meaning"; and "the ability to contribute and participate in the economy with respect, free from domination and humiliation". (Case 153)

Taylor's (2021) prescriptive narrative in Case 181 gestures to a post-COVID-19 world in which wages, working conditions, and dignity for front-line workers will have benefitted from a diminution in the gap between rich and poor.

> I'd rather talk about how we're continuing to shortchange vital workers while Canada's wealthiest CEOs are earning record incomes. Surely our dreams of post-pandemic work should address this widening gap? As it stands, dignity, protection and decent wages for front-line workers are still an afterthought. (Case 181)

As revealed in Table 2, above, there are multiple instances of both predictive and prescriptive narratives regarding the interventionist state, with respect to steering the economy, supporting, or expanding the welfare state, and, to a lesser extent, sustaining order. The general trend of narratives concerning the economy is related to how states will deal with the vast accumulated deficits incurred during the pandemic. One direction is

continued stimulus spending on the basis of activism and big government. As Ned Temko says: "Now the authorities everywhere are using state spending to prime the postpandemic economic pump" (Case 175). Specific mention is made of infrastructure spending, the green economy, support for business recovery, education and skills training, as well as large-scale public sector job creation in public works projects. Related to this are calls for better working conditions and equity for women and racialised minorities. Concerns are expressed about the size of the deficit and what fiscal measures might be needed to cope, including raised taxes and cuts to programs.

Narratives range in specific details, but many call for bigger state spending in general as well as using the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink priorities on a grand scale. Temko illustrates the point by sketching the post-COVID-19 intentions for the interventionist state among moderate-to-conservative leaders:

> Big government is staging a dramatic comeback, and U.S. President Joe Biden's $2.6 trillion infrastructure and investment plan is just the latest sign. After all, his predecessor, Donald Trump, signed off on nearly double that amount in pandemic spending. Across the Atlantic, the government of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has broken with the orthodoxies of Ms. Thatcher and his other Conservative predecessors to announce billions of dollars in new spending, along with higher taxes to pay for it all. German Chancellor Angela Merkel— once the very embodiment of fiscal restraint—has signed off on stimulus and recovery plans to the tune of nearly $1.5 trillion. She's also embraced the idea that an activist government should support and even buy into companies critical to Germany's future economic strength. (Case 175)

Among the most comprehensive and detailed narratives are those calling for a renewal of the Canadian welfare state in the post-COVID-19 setting. Reference is made to the spirit of the New Deal and a return to the Keynesian concept of government as a solution rather than a problem. There are a few specific critiques of capitalism and neoliberalism, but most prescriptions are more generalised and less overtly ideological. There are many specific calls for particular programmes or initiatives in health, long-term care, anti-poverty initiatives, education, the environment, social equity, senior care, universal basic income or guaranteed income, childcare, housing, and other services. This envisaging of a green and sustainable social infrastructure typifies the tone of the 31 prescriptive references regarding the welfare state (see Table 2):

> Public policy and finance are understandably focused on resilient recovery and rebuilding, with unprecedented investments in physical infrastructure to create green jobs that address the imbalance between humanity and the natural environment. To fulfil the potential of this great transition, our social infrastructure needs attention too. "Social infrastructure" includes policies, practices and relationships that enable us to create a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable society, from the grassroots to the global, and spanning health care, education, culture and our democratic processes. COVID-19 has revealed systemic injustices and vulnerabilities including institutionalized racism, substandard seniors housing, the lack of paid sick leave and inadequate childcare. To this list we can add Indigenous reconciliation, the income and wealth gap and the life- and budget-sapping increases in chronic disease. (Case 207)

There is a generalised concern for an orderly polity, but not many references to the role of the state in maintaining order. Given the phasing of the pandemic and the high degree of societal cooperation throughout the period under investigation in our study, this is understandable. In light of the more recent attempted sedition/insurgency of the Canada convoy protests and its blockades and occupations, as well as the use of emergency powers in response by the federal state, there might now be a greater degree of attention to order and the interventionist state in the post-COVID-19 polity. Of the themes developed across narratives of the state and order in the post-COVID-19 polity, there are references both to

the potential for social unrest and political upheaval and to the need to revitalize military resources and personnel as well as atrophied national and global institutions in order to deal with crises and emergencies. While some express concern for the future surveillance apparatus, others, such as this British narrative from The Economist, see in the military an opportunity to build reserves for civil emergency support and to generate economic and trading opportunities:

> Penny Mordaunt, a minister responsible for civil contingencies and co-author of "Greater: Britain after the storm", wants the state to harness those who volunteered to battle coronavirus, directing them towards "national missions", such as elderly care. Ministers plan to overhaul military reserves, and create a new cadre of civilian reservists, such as retired doctors and civil servants, who can be mobilised in crises. (Case 4)

If we return to Table 2, local and community themes and narratives are prominent among the references made to post-COVID-19 polities in the sources we explored and typify many responses. It is clear, however, that the general approach is predictive rather than prescriptive. Specific attention is focused on the opportunity to develop the working from home concept, with its associated risks and opportunities. There is a strong sense of inevitability that the work-life balance of the future will incorporate greater flexibility regarding working from home as well as more options regarding flexitime. While these developments are generally presented as progressive, a few references point out the challenges of equity in working from home. This description of one PR firm expresses the ways in which a progressive narrative of diversity, inclusion, and care is blended into the new business model of hybrid and flexible workplaces, workspaces, and work schedules:

> Weber Shandwick is shifting to a permanent hybrid model (once it is safe for people to return to the office), with employees going in three days a week and working remotely the other two. This model, says Gail Heimann, president and CEO of the public relations giant, allows for a more inclusive and diverse organization, as well as helping to foster a better work-life balance for employees. By providing flexibility to work from various locations, it opens up opportunities to hire more diverse people who typically wouldn't have been considered, like those who don't live near a major metropolitan area, Heimann says. As the ad world takes a hard look internally at its horrific history with diversity and inclusion, this ability to think differently about where they can hire from presents an opportunity to expand the talent pool . . . Amid a crises of women leaving the workforce during the pandemic due to the demands of trying to balance careers alongside childcare (including virtual schooling) and other caregiving responsibilities, a hybrid model can help empower women and other groups without compromising family life. (Case 97)

Other contributions to the themes of local and community as well as local sourcing and craft production stress the possibilities inherent in a return to devolved and outsourced businesses in the community, with cafes, bookstores, libraries, churches, and other entities serving as community hubs. There are references to post-COVID-19 domestic and local tourism, fewer business trips, and less commuting. The virtues of local restaurants, food supply chains, transit options, pedestrianised streets, and shared public spaces are promoted in a post-COVID-19 society. Specific reference is made to local music and arts production, home gyms, the creation of smaller and more intimate care homes for seniors, the upsurge in online shopping, and home renovations, each of which is predicted to continue into post-COVID-19 communities.

There is relatively little direct evidence among the CPI of references to deep democracy or participation in the political sense. Of all the categories, this is the one that is exclusively predictive (see Table 2) and also open with regard to the predictions made. In brief, most references express the precariousness of democracy and its vulnerability to pandemic circumstances. Will there be a political backlash? Can democracy survive following

the experience of control and regulation? Will unscrupulous leaders take advantage of the circumstances? These two extracts from an opinion piece by Francis Fukuyama are illustrative of the narratives of the future. As he says, there are alternative and competing visions of the future:

> The practical realities of handling the pandemic favor professionalism and expertise; demagoguery and incompetence are readily exposed. This should ultimately create a beneficial selection effect, rewarding politicians and governments that do well and penalizing those that do poorly. Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who has steadily hollowed out his country's democratic institutions in recent years, tried to bluff his way through the crisis and is now floundering and presiding over a health disaster. Russia's Vladimir Putin tried to play down the importance of the pandemic at first, then claimed that Russia had it under control, and will have to change his tune yet again as COVID-19 spreads throughout the country. Putin's legitimacy was already weakening before the crisis, and that process may have accelerated. (Case 86)

> Over the years to come, the pandemic could lead to the United States' relative decline, the continued erosion of the liberal international order, and a resurgence of fascism around the globe. It could also lead to a rebirth of liberal democracy, a system that has confounded skeptics many times, showing remarkable powers of resilience and renewal. Elements of both visions will emerge, in different places. Unfortunately, unless current trends change dramatically, the general forecast is gloomy. (Case 86)

Table 2 indicates four themes that fall outside the five original theoretical themes we developed. These classifications were inductively developed from the data and constitute a range of themes that we had not originally conceptualised. We offer some initial and preliminary analysis of these themes but acknowledge that fuller exploration of them is beyond the immediate scope of this article. A substantial category of themes unrelated to our study is labelled as "Other", and they are almost exclusively predictive. These include a large number of business and tourism trends that writers believe will characterise post-COVID-19 societies. Three other categories were of sufficient interest to us to classify them separately in the Table. Related to the other themes, notably local and community perspectives, the interventionist state, and rationality and science, the environment and sustainability emerged in both predictive and prescriptive narratives. Margaret Atwood details her vision for a green and sustainable planet:

> I hope that our desire to green the planet will become stronger post-COVID. Many have turned to Nature during this period, realizing for the first time that it is part of them. Every breath you take contains oxygen made primarily by marine algaes. Kill the oceans and we're dead. My hope is that most people and countries will finally realize that, and take the necessary steps. (Case 217)

> So, let's hope there will many new kinds of jobs. Plastics will have to be rethought so they are less destructive, and cleaning up the plastic mess that's already out there will take years. Lots of jobs there! New uses for unexpected materials are already coming online—heard about the mushroom coffins? I hope that energy conservation will become a widespread goal, and less polluting energy sources such as hydrogen will be deeply explored. (Case 217)

A number of sources aspire similarly to forms of global, cosmopolitan, and multilateral connectivity, a united approach that emerges from the shared challenges of confronting the pandemic itself, the artificiality of borders, and the limitations of national interests. Those constructing narratives of global cooperation express the hope that the spirit of connectedness throughout the pandemic will expand into a deeper and renewed sense of global community in the post-COVID-19 era.

The final theme is labelled "Spiritual/Philosophical" and, unsurprisingly, many of the sources associated with it are religious, denominational, or church-based publications. It would be rash to make too many claims regarding the role and place of organised religion in the current pandemic. However, enforced isolation and distancing has certainly enhanced religiosity in some, even among atheists and agnostics, a quest for some spiritual or philosophical meaning and guidance. Signs of growing spiritual searching, religious observance, and quests for meaning are evident in the output of many of those affected by the global pandemic and condition many of the more spiritual post-COVID-19 narratives. As Bryan Turner says: "Perhaps it is unsurprising, therefore, that together with natural disasters, they have evoked religious responses to calamity that bring into question the meaning of life and its injustice" (Turner 2020). Kofi Hope's vision of "building back better" in the post-COVID-19 world expresses the theme of spiritual connection and its relevance to changing the world for the better:

> We must cut through the culture wars and echo chambers to build consensus on the parts of society needing significant reform. We also need to subvert the ingrained cynicism of our modern age and rebuild our confidence that change is possible, that we can achieve great things together. Many leaders, thinkers and writers are taking on these challenges, but I believe there is one tool in the social change toolbox that we've neglected to use. Spirituality . . . for thousands of years, spiritual approaches to framing and making sense of our world have been used in times of crisis for sense-making, for having collective conversations on our challenges and collective aspirations. The stories and philosophical insights of our religious traditions, along with personal accounts of spiritual learnings—all can help move conversations on big issues from facts and figures to the level of values. (Case 208)

5. Conclusions

It is appropriate that the final narrative thread considered is that of a man called Hope. A common perspective across the narratives found in the sources and references considered in our study is a sense of hope, particularly in those that are prescriptive of the future. Sustaining that hope is a widespread faith in the propensity of individuals and communities to work toward the general improvement of shared conditions and circumstances. Significantly, Capelos and Demertzis characterize individuals in ressentiment as lacking hope "because of their powerlessness and self-victimization" (Capelos and Demertzis 2022, p. 5). The emphasis on hope and faith is not surprising, in that the criteria for inclusion in the study were a reference to the future and a post-COVID-19 or post-pandemic polity. Of course, a view of the future may be dark, even despairing, and hopeless. However, as our data demonstrates, such perspectives did not characterize the 228 sources in our study. Generally, corresponding to our initial theorization of perspectives on the post-COVID-19 polity, the journalists and commentators whose articles we used in our data analyses wrote substantially on narratives of social equality, a renewed interventionist state, and the importance of the local and community. This was particularly so for those references that we classified as prescriptive. The predictive/prescriptive distinction emerged from our reading of the data and reminds us both of the preliminary nature of our research into narratives of the post-COVID-19 polity and the importance of keeping our theoretical frames open to the themes of the empirical data we explore.

As we further noted, there were themes that remained to be developed further, specifically those that we had not originally theorised. Further analyses might pay greater attention to differences among publications according to the phasing of their date of publication. While we used the narrative form in our analysis, it was more of a survey than a fine-grained exploration of the narratives themselves, and it would be interesting to investigate their deeper meaning and implications. We did not differentiate media sources according to their ideological leanings, and this comparison of core belief systems across the media could produce a more refined set of findings. So too would a companion study

of right-wing and populist media sources. We should add that among the large corpus of data we investigated, including those themes originally conceptualised in our theoretical considerations, there remains a broad range of further questions to investigate. In the fast-emerging worlds that have arisen from the pandemic, no singular schema or set of expectations will be sufficient to capture the complexities. Each of us must continue to pay attention, revisit our ideas and the data in the context of new developments, and learn.

The fault lines of the current era are drawn by the closed reactionary goals of the sources of information that inform the Canadian convoy protests. These centre around the ultra-right-wing Fox News and algorithmically-driven social media sources of disinformation and conspiracy theories. The mindset of the protesters is a return to the past, conceived as simpler, purer, and fairer. To this end, the current regime is regarded as having deprived them of their rights and freedoms in an oppressive manner. The movement combines anti-vaccination activists with white nationalists, members of the alt-right, and those standing against "elites" and "political correctness". In contradistinction to this, the progressivism of the mainstream of Canadian journalism, which we have examined through the CPI search engine, is professionally neutral in terms of its set journalistic standards and may include broadly progressive and hopeful editorialising with regard to expectations of the post-COVID-19 polity.

A global pandemic is a world-changing event, altering lives, and seemingly assured social realities in a period of global uncertainty and crisis. At the time of writing, in mid-2022, it is too soon to know the depth and breadth of changes that will emerge from the current circumstances. However, if we and those writing across the Canadian legacy media are right about what has been happening with rationality and science, social equality, the role of the interventionist state, the local and the communitarian, and deep participation, the political changes brought about by the pandemic are likely to be lasting and notable.

But, of course, in light of the shock of the uprising of the Canadian convoy protests and other similar events in other places, none of these claims are straightforward or immediate. In fact, there are a series of acute struggles for hegemony with respect to both material claims and ideational ones. It was Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971), who pointed to the dangers of an old order dying when a new one could not be born. In these circumstances, the world becomes a much more dangerous place, with an increase towards primary, even irreconcilable antagonisms. Much of the struggle is not just with the virus itself, but also with how this period is narrated and whether it is presented as a series of war stories or whether different narratives involving societal change, agency, and different futures can gain traction.

At the end of the contemporary crisis, many will seek to offer alternatives to the return to the old norms and business as usual, or, even further, to recover mythologised pasts. It will be interesting to see how far the voices we have identified remain dominant narratives, able to force an open debate around the exit strategies from the pandemic. The question of whether such narratives can become embedded or lead to more inclusive, equal, and democratic societies rest largely on the role of civil society.

It will be years, perhaps even decades, until the vast social, political, economic, and technological outcomes brought about by the pandemic are fully realized. Those anticipating a return to pre-pandemic normality may be shocked to find that many of the previous systems, structures, norms, markets, and employment are no longer there to return to. The extracts we have presented represent the predictions as well as the prescriptions of the many journalists and commentators who share our interest and prefigure the future in their narratives. In the words of The Whos' "Won't Get Fooled Again", it may be some time until we know if the "new boss" is the same as the "old boss".

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Article

Narrating Resistant Citizenships through Two Pandemics

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Abstract: Covid has intensified inequalities in the UK, particularly for those already living with structural disadvantage, and despite community and popular resistance to those losses. Covid has also disproportionately affected people with HIV, especially those already living with multi-dimensional inequalities. However, many people with HIV have, as they have done before, made strong and often successful efforts to resist and to restore or reconstruct their citizenships, in opposition to dominant, dispossessing discourses during Covid times. A narrative approach offers a means of mapping these citizenly technologies. This article draws on a 2020 study conducted with 16 people living with HIV in the UK. The study explored, through telephone semi-structured interviews, the health, economic, and psychosocial resources with which these participants lived with HIV and how Covid has impacted those resources. Narrative analysis showed losses of HIV and other health resources, constituting reductions in health citizenship, resisted largely by reconstitutions of alternatives within the HIV sector; losses of economic citizenship, despite oppositional, anti-political attempts to retain it, and of psychosocial citizenship, in spite of family and friendship networks; resistant, 'alter' development of renewed HIV citizenships; and across fields, resistance by complaint. This study indicates that 'de-citizening' citizenship losses are likely to also affect other groups with long-term conditions, illnesses, and disabilities. Resistant 're-citizening' technologies, while important, had limited effects. The study suggests potential future resistant effects of repeated 'complaint' about Covid-era citizenship losses, and the more general significance of histories of dissent for future effective resistance.

Keywords: covid; HIV; citizenship; resistance; anti-politics; alter-politics; complaint

1. Introduction

1.1. Covid, Political Resistance, and HIV Narratives

What are the actualities and possibilities of political resistance, broadly understood, within the Covid pandemic? At first, 'resistance' sounds simple. As social movement scholars (e.g., Kaun and Trere 2020) emphasise, resistance is a relationship: it involves responding to a force. More complexly, political resistance involves contested engagements, encompassing, as Chantal Mouffe (1992) describes, the subjects' relations and actions across many fields. This article examines everyday political resistance (Campbell and Cornish 2021) to a dominant UK government Covid discourse which exerted strong forces on people's lives in 2020. The article argues that narrative research can provide an extensive and nuanced understanding of such everyday political resistance. To build such understanding, it is helpful to turn to people with narratable pandemic knowledge—in this case, people living with HIV. People with HIV have lived through another uncertain, complex, and often-denied pandemic, which deepened inequalities and restricted citizenly entitlements, and which required decisive, community-driven public health interventions. Many people with HIV are also accustomed to narrating, not least to themselves, their lives with a condition whose medical, psychosocial, and material complexities escape unified description or theory but appear intricately and fully in narratives. Consequently, people with HIV have a lot to say about Covid (e.g., Petretti et al. 2021), and that was a primary reason for this study.

HIV narratives have often articulated resistance to powerful political discourses which minimised or marginalised HIV and erased or restricted resources to deal with it. Such resistance won many gains—for instance, getting HIV seen as a health, not a moral issue, and expanding effective treatment to the majority world (e.g., Mbali 2013; Robins 2006; Epstein 1998; Powers 2017). However, these HIV narratives also display resistance's failures—for example, to be inclusive, politically effective, and sustainable (Nguyen 2010; Padamsee 2020; Whiteside and De Waal 2004). Covid narratives, too, generate effective resistance alongside failures. For instance, long Covid stories, testifying to long-term viral effects initially dismissed or psychologised by many doctors, have generated gains in medical treatment and social protection which nevertheless remain limited (Alwan 2021).

To address this ambivalence, this article begins by considering the successes and failures of political resistance, understood broadly, during the UK Covid pandemic. It next sketches histories of resistance within the HIV pandemic; political resistance's relation to citizenships; and the value of narrative research for exploring citizenly resistance. The article then describes a study of 16 people with HIV's narratives of their lives within the two pandemics, the everyday resistant citizenships those narratives articulate, and the implications of such resistance stories.

1.2. Dominant Early Covid Discourse and Resistance to It

What, in the early days of the UK Covid pandemic, was there to resist? Occasionally, UK government agencies talked about reducing Covid prevalence and mortality to low levels, maintaining health services, and protecting people's livelihoods and wellbeing—aims broadly in line with those articulated by public health voices at every level, from community groups to the World Health Organization (WHO). At the same time, local government, education, social care, business, and medical subfields—for instance, respiratory and emergency medicine, virology, epidemiology, and immunology—generated field-specific discourses. However, prior to vaccine rollout, the UK government also articulated a complex, consistent and overarching discourse: 'perform "care", minimise Covid, profit'. This Foucauldian formation of knowledge, practice, and power was an early sub-discourse of the much larger 'live with' Covid discourse that Mark Davis explicates in this special issue, across countries, and over a longer timeframe. It proclaimed government care, particularly for the old; support for the UK's free National Health Service (NHS); public financial assistance as needed; and efficient Covid mitigation, testing and tracing. In practice, this discourse allowed morbidity and mortality at just-acceptable rates; disregarded rates among the old, ill, disabled, key workers, and racialised groups; overburdened the NHS, encouraging health privatisation; nepotistically awarded personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and track and trace service contracts to inefficient, expensive companies; and promoted economic 'opening up' at the cost of infections and lives (Sim and Tombs 2022). The strategy generated mortality and morbidity rates and health, economic, and psychosocial harms exceeding those in most other rich countries (Marmot et al. 2021). The normalised chaos it supported, dispersed and concealed responsibility.

A likely outcome was resistance to this discourse. In the pandemic's first year, polls showed British people consistently saying that the government had mismanaged Covid, delivering corruptly, unfairly, and poorly (Barker and Russell 2020; Pew Research Center 2020; Watterson 2020). Within the global picture of declining 'trust' in government (Edelman 2021), Covid-era UK confidence in government fell (Wright et al. 2021). Stable 'trust' became local, restricted to employers and NGOs, business and media (Edelman 2021; Goldstraw et al. 2021).

However, until early 2022, when polls swung away from politicians seen as partying against Covid mitigation rules while voters followed those rules at great economic and personal cost, perceived UK government failures hardly changed voting intentions. Political resistance looked small-scale, often rooted in denialism, libertarianism, and right-wing populism rather than calls to take Covid more seriously and manage it responsibly. Covid-safe in-person collective action seemed unsafe, and digital activism limited (Goldstraw

et al. 2021). Covid's continuing health, psychosocial and material impact on people's lives often made resistance other than everyday survival appear impossible.

At the same time, resistance to the UK government's dominant Covid discourse and its results manifested in multiple, under-acknowledged ways. We can understand this resistance, following Ghassan Hage's (2015) description of 'alter' forms of politics, as alter-resistance. Such resistance, because rooted in realities alternative to those of hegemonic state discourses, is frequently underestimated. For instance, in Covid-inflected circumstances of vulnerable health, older age, isolation, low income, and food, energy, housing and transport poverty, day-to-day survival was indeed itself resistance. Most people's Covid responses were consistently careful and egalitarian, differing radically from the government's 'pandemic fatigue' expectations (Reicher and Drury 2021) and laissez-faire policies (ONS 2021). Covid-era digital organising, though not fully accessible, was inclusive and empowering (Goldstraw et al. 2021; Westgarth and Pasquarelli 2020); campaigns around Long Covid are good examples (Alwan 2021). Local mutual aid groups, horizontally organised, were novel and effective political forces in the first lockdown (Chevee 2021), framing politics as care rather than protest.

Such alter-resistance coexisted with what Hage (2015) calls oppositional or anti-politics, which operates within the realities of dominant discourses. For example, mutual aid groups also worked against the dominant Covid discourse's betrayal of hegemonic citizenly principles—rights, neoliberal efficiency, and resistance itself (O'Dwyer et al. 2022). Civil society campaigns criticised inadequate social protection and fought to restore food and fuel security (Child Poverty Action Group and Church of England 2020). Health and social care workers' concerns about low pay settlements, understaffing and safety concerns—largely supported by public opinion—pushed the government to pursue non-UK healthcare worker employment, and—briefly—to support safer practices.

This article addresses how such qualified yet effective resistance is narrated by people with HIV, who bring pandemic expertise to Covid as they live through 'pandemic' a second time.

1.3. HIV, Covid, and Resistance

Currently, the HIV pandemic gives cause for optimism. People with HIV look forward to a healthy, normal lifespan with rewarding work and relationships. Well-treated HIV is untransmissible, something that facilitates and even liberates people with HIV's lives.

Moreover, many people living with HIV are affected by Covid just like anyone else.

However, people with HIV also have double the chance of dying from Covid, a risk related to poor health due to HIV and/or co-morbidities, being male, being older, being poorer, and belonging to Black, Asian, and other non-white ethnicities (Ambrosioni et al. 2021; Bhaskaran et al. 2020; Brown et al. 2022; Dhairyawan and Chetty 2020). Such socio-economic inequalities, which also shape the UK Covid pandemic overall, negatively impacted the lives of people with HIV before Covid (HIV Psychosocial Network 2017; National AIDS Trust 2014). Moreover, Covid, while it did not immediately impact UK HIV treatment, impeded prevention, testing, checks and treatment for HIV-related and other conditions, and ART adherence (Ambrosioni et al. 2021; Petretti et al. 2021). It reduced psychosocial support and increased isolation and mental health problems—issues which already particularly affected people living with HIV (All-Party Parliamentary Group on HIV/AIDS 2020).

Just 0.1% of the UK population is HIV positive. But their Covid-era medical, psychosocial, and material difficulties parallel those of the 19% of UK people (15 million) living with a long-term condition, 18% (14 million) living with disabilities, and 3.7% (3 million) considered clinically extremely vulnerable people. However, people with HIV also live with a long history of national and global resistance to dominant health discourses, which they bring to the new pandemic.

Within the pre-Covid HIV pandemic, as within the Covid pandemic now, political resistance was nevertheless limited—sometimes, as with Covid, by governance failures

and denialism (Botel 2020; Whiteside and De Waal 2004; Padamsee 2020; Edelman et al. 2020). Again, as with Covid, political resistance was later muted by dominant discourses that, in a time of effective biomedical solutions (Squire 2013b) naturalised HIV's endemicity, idealised biomedical solutions, and marginalised 'left-behind', less-powerful groups—in the case of HIV, gay men, women, trans people, drug users, sex workers, and people on low incomes (Squire 2013b; UNAIDS 2015). Such groups constitute a majority of those doing less well with HIV and now, Covid.

Despite these limits, socio-political HIV resistance to dominant, HIV-minimising discourses has often been extremely effective. As with Covid, it both built on earlier traditions—those within civil rights and anticolonial struggles, feminisms, and LGBTQ rights—and generated new forms of activism (Mbali 2013; Robins 2006; Epstein 1998; Powers 2017). Such new HIV resistance in turn shaped later resistance in health (Daftary et al. 2017) and other fields of injustice (Crimp 2011). Some of this resistant force was, in Hage's terms, anti-political. For instance, HIV activists gained medical recognition for women's ignored symptoms and campaigned against policies that assumed African countries could not roll out HIV treatment. At other times, such resistant force was tangential, creating new, 'alter' possibilities of living with HIV. Such 'alter' resistance generated models of care as politics (Catalan et al. 2020); changed relations to bodies, identities, and the biomedical state (Young et al. 2019); and operated quiet, hidden, 'slow' activisms (Campbell and Cornish 2021; Mulubale et al. 2021).

Drawing on these histories of doubled anti- and alter-resistance, UK efforts to address HIV during Covid times have reconfigured and strengthened, (Petretti et al. 2021). HIV testing, treatment and support have extended to digital as well as face-to-face services. Researchers and activists have reanimated HIV history to interrogate Covid-era criminalisation and individualisation of risk, pleasure and safety, and to point up the importance of open discussion and collective solutions (Garcia-Iglesias et al. 2021). This article explores whether and how people with HIV are generating such HIV-informed resistance to dominant Covid discourses within their everyday lives.

1.4. Understanding HIV and Covid Resistance through Narratives of Citizenship

A useful approach to HIV and Covid alter- and anti-resistances and their limits may be to consider the citizenships through which people live and resist the pandemics. Activists and researchers in the HIV sector have gone beyond legal and political senses of citizenship, building on broad social justice approaches to citizenships, including those within feminism and anti-racism. The health, biopolitical, economic, and psychosocial citizenships of people with HIV that they describe are active, contested and equivalent, differentiated rather than exclusionary or inclusionary, and inhabited by multi-dimensional inequalities (Lister 1997; Mouffe 1992; Mulubale 2020; Nguyen 2010; Paparini and Rhodes 2016; Robins 2006; Squire 2013b; Young et al. 2019). Such differentiated citizenships can help us explore resistant and hegemonic discourses of pandemics; for citizenships are socio-political technologies traversing discourses (Behrent 2013), linking identity and rights to everyday lives as well as to broader discursive formations. This framing of 'citizenship' has been part of campaigns for women's reproductive rights and trans people's gender-affirming treatment rights—as well as people with HIV's rights to medical treatment and socio-legal equity. Current assertions of the rights of people with long Covid, and of people with disabilities, long-term health conditions, and immunosuppression in situations of high unmitigated Covid prevalence, might similarly be seen as claims on citizenship.

Since 2010, the UK government has implemented cost-cutting 'austerity' measures that have eroded health, economic and psychosocial citizenships—losses that have powerfully affected people with HIV (HIV Psychosocial Network 2017). Covid has the potential to further exclude people with HIV from citizenships. People with HIV are now subject to increased NHS constraints that render them lesser health citizens. Those on low wages or benefits face the cost-of-living increases generated by Covid, alongside Brexit and European conflict. Ongoing high-prevalence Covid further compromises people with

HIV's health, economic and psychosocial citizenships, and their rights to claim them. This article considers how people with HIV may restore or reconstruct citizenship technologies and, in that process, resist the dominant discourses that have dispossessed them.

The article focuses on narrative in order to research these Covid-era citizenship losses and resistances for several reasons. First, subjects may be said to have a necessary, though not sufficient, 'right to narrate' (Bhabha 2000). Asserting such a right is itself a resistant move; it stakes citizenship claims within representational and broader politics (Bhabha 2000). The assertion of this right has a long history in the HIV pandemic and—especially in the case of long Covid and people who are immunosuppressed—a growing place in the new pandemic too. Second, narratives are not simply telling but also ways of expressing and making knowledge and effects (Plummer 2019). In the HIV pandemic, narratives have gathered people together, literally and representationally, to initiate, potentiate, amplify and constitute resistance. Third, narratives' occurrence at different scales and across varying modalities (Squire et al. 2014) allows for the reading of multiple registers of resistance, including often-ignored alter-resistances. Lastly, a focus on narratives allows this study to approach more closely the relationships between discourses and their citizenly effects. Narratives, as forms of discourse that build meaning sequentially, and that link subjective to social and historical formations (Carolissen and Kiguwa 2018), can elucidate both how dominant UK Covid discourses erode people with HIV's lived citizenships, and how people speak and act to resist, recover and reconstitute those losses. Indeed, narratives' descriptive and generative role has already been explored in relation to pandemic, and specifically HIV, discourse (M. Davis 2021; Squire 2013b).

2. Research Process

This study, a sister project with initiatives in Zambia, Brazil, and South Africa (Mulubale et al. Forthcoming) began with extensive consultation with community-based HIV NGOs and potential participants. Ethical approval was granted by the University of East London. The research was developed with two longstanding London NGOs with diverse memberships and the ability to support participants through a portfolio of services, should the research reveal a need.

During the UK's first spring 2020 Covid lockdown, when only essential work travel and shopping and brief daily exercise outside the home were permitted, we conducted semi-structured audio-recorded phone interviews, modally hour-long, with 16 participants. All had participated in a 27-participant 2019 interview and visual workshop study of living with HIV in constrained resource contexts. This follow-up study explored how COVID-19 was affecting participants' resource contexts, and what Covid meant for them in relation to HIV. Non-Covid-related physical and mental health issues, and loss of follow-up through lack or failure of prior phone contacts, meant that those not re-interviewed were mostly not available.

Interviews covered physical and mental health services, and psychosocial support—family and friendship networks, social services and NGOs, faith, media, income, education, food, housing, transport, sanitation, and personal living strategies. Researchers did not press participants to discuss all potential topics, but rather followed the participants' lead in exploring areas that they selected as important. Researchers were mindful of time, energy, and other constraints affecting participants during extended calls. Interviews were transcribed and transcripts checked and returned to participants for comment.

Participants received expenses calculated at two hours university research assistant rate (#45). This amount covered phone and data costs, and travel and subsistence for in-person post-research visual methods and feedback meetings, which are ongoing. The amount was decided by discussion with NGOs and potential participants as properly valuing participants' incurred costs, time, and research contribution, something often said not to be achieved economically or in other ways by research compensation. The research's financial and other recognition of people with HIV's participation and expertise was also in line with the Greater/Meaningful Involvement of People with HIV/AIDS (GIPA/MIPA)

and the Denver Principles laid out by people with HIV in the US in 1983. Participants continue to be involved with the analysis and are developing their work for this project in other directions—for instance, through blogs.

Half of the participants identified as bisexual or gay men; seven described themselves as heterosexual or bisexual women; and one as a heterosexual man. Participants came from a wide range of national backgrounds; half were majority world participants.

Participants lived in the London context of relatively high HIV prevalence, testing, and treatment access: London met UNAIDS's 2025 95-95-95 targets—for 95% of people with HIV to be diagnosed, 95% of those diagnosed to be accessing treatment, and 95% of those on treatment to be virally suppressed—during 2021. London's Covid prevalence was high and despite relatively good NHS capacity, Covid and other medical demands put the NHS under severe pressure at the time of the research.

Participants were almost all over 40. Most had been diagnosed for more than five years and had co-morbidities. This profile may have resulted from research processes centering on service-providing NGOs. However, people with HIV cannot easily be divided into NGO service 'users' and 'non-users'. Some participants were minor, occasional, or short-term service users. Moreover, people with long and complex histories of living with HIV also took part because they described themselves as having significant pandemic knowledge to contribute.

Participant involvement included research process and question framing, checking and commenting on transcripts, and for 11, responding to analyses—which included de-identified interview materials—sometimes in writing to be included in publications. The prior research process meant participants already had good relations with the research team. Collaboration was partial; it did not constitute co-production or critical participatory action research. However, it is continuing.

Narrative thematic analysis was performed (Riessman 2008; Squire 2013a) using an inclusive definition of narrative as symbol sequences that build meaning across time, space, and/or causality (Squire et al. 2014). Analysis paid attention to narrative structure, content, and contexts. It attended to how and where narrators positioned themselves in relation to dominant and resistant narratives about HIV and Covid. It also considered actual and potential story audiences, endeavoring to understand whether the narratives' performances pushed back against the force of hegemonic narratives. (Boonzaier 2019; Phoenix 2013). For stories told within research are almost always told in other contexts too. Research participants living with HIV may be telling stories similar to those they tell in the research to themselves, for instance, as well as to friends, family, HIV support networks—and sometimes more broadly.

3. Findings

In what follows, I describe four thematic categories of narratives, how those narratives explain participants' relations to dominant Covid discourses and their citizenship effects, and how the narratives may operate as forms of citizenly resistance.

3.1. Reduced, Precaritised, and Reconstructed Health and HIV Citizenships

All participants told stories of reduced HIV medical services—for instance, telephone or video appointments, posted medications, longer-term prescriptions, non-HIV treatment delays, and extended appointment intervals. These stories were congruent with the government's occasional early-epidemic public health, all-in-it-together discourse, and participants evaluated them positively, as protective. The potentially health-precaritising effects of these allegedly temporary Covid-era health citizenship losses were marked, however, by participants foreshadowing the dangers of ongoing delays and a lack of face-to-face appointments. Such foreshadowing constituted direct anti-resistance to the marginalising of groups needing ongoing care within the larger, hegemonic 'perform "care", minimise Covid, profit' state Covid discourse.

Eleven participants told stories of expanded support from HIV medical professionals, who provided Covid information and personally checked in with patients via email, social media, and/or phone. This was a new, reconstructed or 'alter' HIV health citizenship, a tangential rather than direct force of resistance that created a new space of medical practice.

All participants also narrated obtaining good medical Covid knowledge through processes often learned from prior pursuit of HIV knowledge. This new Covid expertise, despite its limits as anti-critical resistance to the government's minimising discourse, enabled participants' own, 'alter'-resistant everyday lives.

For instance, Anabella (respondents chose all project names), a Black African woman in her 60s, narrated in several places her awareness of Covid mortality and ambiguities, and how she used her knowledge to keep herself safe:

> **Anabella:** Yeah, actually, um, it's been very very tough/mhm/um, during this time, you know of COVID-19/mhm/it's very scary/yeah/and uh, it's like um, it's uncertain, you never know how the day is gonna end up. If you have to go out, like let's say I need to go out and get some milk/mhm/you don't know whether you gonna come back, or if you gonna come back with the virus/right/mhm . . .

> **Interviewer:** Yeah, sure. Are you uh, are you taking you know, precautions hygiene-wise, is that for you, er.

> **Anabella:** Yes, actually, I'm actually very good at that/mhm/I don't hold the door handles with my hands. Um, when I get time I sanitise the, you know, I use the wipes/yeah/to wipe them and every time I go out, I get a tissue and then you know, put the tissue on my face and then open the door, you know/of course/yeah, that's what I try, by all means . . . I know a lot of people (who) have actually died and um, yeah it's like I'm trying to be extra careful not to be the next one, you know/of course/. Even not to try and be get the virus and take it to the next (HIV support group) session you know . . .

Anabella's narrative first anti-resistantly marks the restrictions that characterise the difficult, 'scary' Covid every day of someone who has to protect her health in a high-prevalence environment. This daily life differed markedly from the wide-ranging daily activities she described the previous year. Second, Anabella narrates the accreting illness and death around her—particularly among the majority-world people, highly exposed through racialised patterns of high Covid-risk housing and low-waged employment, who constitute much of her network. Her narrative thus instantiates a newly precaritised health citizenship, anti-politically resisting contemporary government discourses of un-problematic population-wide health agency. At the same time, the narrative articulates, from Anabella's position as a Black African woman with HIV, an 'alter' resistance that reconstructs health citizenship through forms of care and carefulness she and her friends define and live for themselves.

3.2. From Reduced and Removed Economic Citizenships to Limited Restoration

Nine participants who had in prior interviews narrated their economic precarity, told detailed anti-critically resistant stories enumerating economic and other material losses. Mr. Oscar Milk, for example, a white British man in his 50s living with HIV and co-morbidities, told a long story, partly shown here, about his inability to access food during the first lockdown. The government classified Mr. Oscar Milk as 'vulnerable', directed him to 'shield' at home, but failed to deliver pledged food support, while supermarket delivery websites crashed or closed:

> **Mr. Oscar Milk:** Well, I mean, the worst thing about it is that, that feeling of going cap in hand. I, I constantly feel that, like I'm begging. Particularly when I didn't have any food in the house/Yeah/I couldn't get anybody to take me seriously at first {sighs} . . . I could, I could, um, I can't get to the post office to collect my money/Mhm/and luckily I have some money for a rainy day/Mhm/. But the money was no good to me, it was almost like a Hollywood movie plot/Yeah/. I

had the money but the money was no good to me/Mhm/. What I needed was I needed some emergency provisions to keep me going until things went a little bit back to normal . . . It was only when I got the referral through to the food bank in (London church) . . . they actually did come through with a food parcel and I'm really grateful to them because I was getting to, into a really dodgy situation, you know.

Milk tells a vivid anti-political story of his resistance to his food rights' removal—a dispossession that left him 'begging'. HIV organisations are not here the basis of his minimally restorative narrative of how, in the end, he got basic provisions. However, his ability to search persistently for help relates to his prior experiences of pursuing entitlements as a person living with HIV and other illnesses, as someone concerned about social justice, and as a gay man—an association with dissent emblematised in his chosen project name. He thus also articulates a resistant 'alter' socio-economic citizenship drawn from HIV and other histories. Mr. Oscar Milk told such stories of successful struggle more widely, too, especially in online HIV fora, aiming to encourage those with less experience to resist as he does.

3.3. Psychosocial Citizenships: Reduced, Removed, and Reconstructed

Ten participants told stories registering reduced, sometimes removed social and emotional citizenship. Such losses led to more isolation, anxiety, and depression. Eight participants narrated family and friendship networks and seven, the HIV sector, as restoring psychosocial citizenship to some extent but also reconstructing it, for instance with health citizenship, through new online support.

Participants also told stories about a range of other personal and social resources, they used to reconstruct Covid-era psychosocial citizenships in alter-resistant ways. For instance, Mr. Oscar Milk's story of a freshly realised sociality demonstrates a brief reconstruction of general psychosocial citizenship:

> **Mr. Oscar Milk:** I was so surprised. I thought everybody in (central London) is so jaded, I didn't expect it ('clap for carers') to happen. But/{laughs}/they all did it and I was absolutely amazed. It's so noisy. And/Really?/yeah, the only people that funnily enough don't do it is there's a very posh block that or, originally was like offices/Right/and they're all like diplomats in there/Mhm/and they just closed the, shut, closed the curtains and hide all that {laughs}.Really? Really? Oh, okay/{laughs}. All of the different people, you know, I mean, all of the different colours and nationalities, you know, they were all hanging out the window banging and I was really pleased, because I was absolutely convinced that being (central London), that whole sense of community is gone, but they all do it, and it, it is quite impressive. I do get quite a tingle when it happens.

Milk's narrative here is of alter-resistance via a kind of epiphany. The Thursday evening 'clap for carers' moments of social solidarity—albeit excluding elites—overturn his previous cynical understanding of urban life. Another world, it seems for a moment, really is possible. Appropriately, Milk told this story to his own carers. The reconstructive possibility passed quickly, however, for Milk, his carers, and others, flooded out by the government's performative discourse of care for carers which continued to under provide PPE and pay them minimum wage.

3.4. The Reconstructed HIV Citizen; the Revulnerablised HIV Citizen

HIV histories and presents were often the basis for participants' resistance. Six participants narrated HIV as a general resource for their reconstructive, 'alter' resistance to Covid-era reductions and removals of citizenships. For example, Maria, a white European woman who lived with HIV and co-morbidities, described HIV NGOs providing food, counseling, and medical checks during lockdown as all in different ways keeping her 'afloat':

Maria: if I hadn't had that [HIV NGO] support I wouldn't have the motivation at all/yeah/not even from the beginning of that [lockdown]. Um, so it's, the support is what kept me afloat/mhm/ . . . In practical terms, in the sense for example (HIV NGO 1)/yeah/it's a delivery with food, also,/mhm/which is quite good and um, for example (HIV NGO 2) have done the coaching/mhm/so yes, so they are the ones that are keeping me afloat/yeah yeah/there is one that is calling and connecting (us) as well, that one that is (HIV NGO 3),/mhm/that is (HIV NGO 3) and now they are called (HIV NGO 4) and they are doing my (weight)/ah okay/that is quite good because we are not working and we are stuck at home and yes, we are then more afraid of the locked in, I am more afraid of no,/yeah/putting on more weight and then developing and having higher cholesterol and so the nurse with the council explained to me the um () I have to disclose a lot of things/right/and so,/yeah yeah/at that point, I don't want to disclose all my data, so yeah that is the thing that um . . .

This alternative realm of HIV citizenship does not try to reclaim rights within existing health, social and voluntary services, now increasingly run as marketised siloes. The HIV NGOs Maria mentions work holistically, collaborating to meet her material, psychological and health requirements. Instead of resisting other organisations' disclosure strictures, Maria's HIV citizenship, supported by HIV NGOs, simply puts her rights to confidentiality first.

Yet, this HIV citizenship comes with a difficult history. Participants also narrated Covid as revisiting HIV trauma. This re-traumatising generated fear, made Covid more difficult, and positioned them as re-vulnerabilised, re-ignored citizens. As Maria, again, put it:

Maria: but um yes it all depends in which circumstances you are/yeah yeah/and also the baggage, the baggage that you carry./yes yes/I think that people, I mean that people living with HIV or people who have uh, I mean I'm talking about my case but who have, who are living with HIV and in my case for example that have to live with it more than 30 years, I think that psychologically, we are way more scared/mhm/because we had to go that initial phase of facing death, you know, we were told we were going to die, then we lost many friends, um, so yes it has been a bumpy ride I would say/yeah/all those 30 years, so you know, then I was diagnosed with the cancer. So psychologically, you are more scared, you know I am more scared/yeah yeah/and in some cases that would make it perhaps a bit more difficult to cope?/yes/I mean ( ) more resilient, sometimes we can be more resilient but still, uh . . .

Maria's narrative moves here from the sociality and support of HIV citizenship in Covid times, to the limits of such alter-resistance. Medical and social protection against Covid is falling short, as such protection did with HIV. Again, they 'leave behind' those who fall outside dominant narratives that naturalise healthy, productive citizens. In such circumstances, the fragility and fear that end Maria's story are a powerful anti-resistance to Covid's discursive minimizing. Furthermore, this is a narrative that is appearing elsewhere in the HIV sector, articulated both by those with HIV and those working in HIV services.

3.5. The Citizenship of Pandemic Complaint

Within study participants' anti- and alter-narratives, and outside of them, it was also possible to hear parallel narratives of what sounded like a third kind of resistance: resistance as complaint. These narratives were testimonies against injustice, like those Sara Ahmed (2021) describes within feminist resistance. Such witness-bearing narratives carry criticality, but they do not generate anti- or alter-political resolution. They simply mark and re-mark what has been lost or broken by Covid and needs to be reclaimed or mended. They may often be dismissed, viewed as annoying distractions—as happens with feminist complaints about, for instance, sexual harassment and domestic violence—but

they continue, insistently, to be made. Arabella's noting of all the things she had to do to protect herself in a governmentally-sanctioned high-prevalence environment, Mr. Oscar Milk's detailed description of the many refusals of his food rights, and Maria's lament for the renewed damage of the past, instantiated such quiet but consistent, resistant complaint. Complaint might not operate as directly or obviously effective resistance; but it builds up a layered history of objection that does not go away, that waits for the future.

4. Discussion

As implied by many earlier studies on Covid's intensification of inequalities (UN 2021; World Economic Forum 2021) and by other research on how that intensification is playing out for people with HIV (Ambrosioni et al. 2021; Bhaskaran et al. 2020; Brown et al. 2022; Dhairyawan and Chetty 2020), this study found that the pandemic had extended the entitlement losses with which people with HIV live. While participants' health citizenship was previously relatively well supported, Covid had generated ongoing health resource precarity and reduction. It had also lessened and at times removed economic and psychosocial citizenships. Few participants thought these citizenly losses were restorable. Rather, they told stories of what we can call *de-citizening* technologies, delivering irreversible entitlement losses in the service of dominant state Covid discourses. Such narratives of de-citizening differed from the stories of qualified erosions and gradualised reshapings of citizenships that HIV activists and researchers have previously told: they marked breaks, rather than shifts.

Participants' narratives also documented and performed *re-citizening* technologies that contested these newly sharpened effects of dominant Covid discourses. Re-citizening operated through anti-political criticisms of resource loss, the pursuit of resource restoration, and reconstructive alter-resistances. In the re-citizening narratives, restoration failed or was contingent; reconstruction was limited, often unsustainable. Re-citizening's resistance did not have comparable power to de-citizening, as Maria's narrative of the impossibilities of psychosocial protection from pandemic re-traumatising showed. However, re-citizening narratives demonstrated how anti- and alter-political resistances can occupy the same spaces, operating either sequentially or alongside each other, supporting Hage's (2015) explication of the necessity of these different critical politics working together. In this special issue, Davis's broader survey of the possibilities of an affirmative bio-political Covid commons resonates with these re-citizenings. While 'hope' is too bald, simplistic and comforting a term to apply to these participants' difficult narrative endeavours, in research and in other areas of their everyday lives, the Freirian embedding of hope within struggle, on which Ann Phoenix draws in this volume, perhaps provides a workable frame for their re-citizening.

Participants' resistance narratives indicated a notable resurgence of HIV-specific support in Covid times. This move toward HIV-specific citizenship drew on people with HIV's resources as pandemic experts. It also reinforced the importance of addressing alter-political processes. However, it is important not to romanticise such a move. Participants noted at the same time the other resources on which they drew—for instance, for Mr. Oscar Milk, a broader history of pursuing social justice. They also repeatedly noted the limits of HIV-specific citizenships as resistances to dominant Covid discourses.

In an economic situation where all participants previously managing precariously were now not managing, participants did not narrate extensive economic re-citizening. Such moves must be pursued in other sectors. International NGOs and policymakers emphasise the need for governments' enhanced investment in and commitment to social protection to maintain the citizenships of those who are Covid-disenfranchised, particularly those already living with multi-dimensional inequalities (UN 2021; UNAIDS 2021; World Economic Forum 2021). Highly HIV- and Covid-affected countries like South Africa are considering radical economic shifts in tax or social grants like Basic Income Grant to meet such requirements (Pienaar et al. 2021). High-income countries now facing cost-of-living pressures they have not experienced for 50 years, alongside the legacy disenfranchisements

of 20 years of austerity, and ongoing Covid waves, may need to look at similar measures (Patel and Kariel 2021).

Participants' narratives of de-citizening and re-citizening raise the possibility that similar Covid-era de-citizening and re-citizening technologies may be in play for people living with other health conditions, disabled people, and those disenfranchised by economic, food, energy and transport poverty, and racialised injustice. These groups' Covid-era low- or no-wage and low-consumption status, and their Covid vulnerabilisation, mean that current naturalising state discourses of Covid ignore them, positioning them as non-viable. Such citizenly exclusion is signalled by, for instance, the withdrawal of rights to free Covid testing, PPE at work, supported isolation, masking, and indoor distancing. In Covid's contemporary discursive economy, the waste-matter status of people with HIV and similar others—not even recognised as useful material, let alone as citizens—also points up the increasingly machinic, non-human discursive status of everyone else. Those who still claim full health, economic and psychosocial citizenships are now, as Mbembe (2020a, 2020b) points out, always precariously positioned: at risk of falling out of citizenship, even humanness, into discursive abjectification; and as Davis points out, citing Mbembe, outside the conditions of life itself.

A future of resistance is perhaps being mobilised against these intensified exclusions through the narratives of complaint that appeared across participants' interviews. These insistent complaining re-markings work in and of themselves; they are not routes to or from other forms of resistance. However, even if they are ignored, neglected or repressed, by claiming the right to narrate precisely the removal of rights, they staked an ongoing claim for that removal to be recognised and responded to.

Politically resistant discourses are, like dominant discourses, not only about what is happening now. As Angela Davis (2021) and Cornell West, writing about Black Lives Matter in the aftermath of George Floyd's death and within the ongoing Covid pandemic emphasised, resistance is a historical process of many 'moments of interruption' accompanied by efforts to sustain them (West 2021; see also Phoenix, this volume). These confluences of resistance also take place across many different domains, some of them not immediately obvious (M. Davis 2021). In this study, participants' resistant stories were fed by people with HIV's past struggles to be heard and effect change—struggles which were often ignored, neglected and repressed before they succeeded—as well as by the pursuit of social equity in other fields, particularly that of racialised injustice. The way in which such resistance mobilises HIV and other histories and presents to accrete a progressive future, even in regressive times, itself tells an important story about how resistances to dominant discourses across time, and from different contexts, can become amplifying resources for present crisis.

Attention to narratives allows for the exploration of such processes, particularly at the level of their everyday enactment. Each story told in the research, because it is just one story among a crowd of related narrative performances, indicates how such narratives can exert and intensify resistant force by generating new citizenly possibilities. For people do not just tell such stories in research—very often, they tell them elsewhere. As exemplified by re-citizening narratives in this article, participants were telling their HIV and Covid stories to families, friends, professionals, and HIV networks, setting up expanding ripples of re-citizening that, despite their limits, showed how lived resistance may spread and grow.

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Article

'Live with the Virus' Narrative and Pandemic Amnesia in the Governance of COVID-19

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Abstract: Political leaders have commonly used the phrase 'learn to live with the virus' to explain to citizens how they should respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. I consider how the 'live with the virus' narrative perpetrates pandemic amnesia by refusing what is known about pandemic-related inequities and the strategies that can be used to overcome these effects. Advice to 'live with the virus' helps to further austerity public policy and therefore individualises the social and health burdens of post pandemic life. 'Live with the virus' asks citizens to look only to their own futures, which are political strategies that might work for privileged individuals who have the capacity to protect their health, but less well for those with limited personal resources. I draw on Esposito's framing of affirmative biopolitics and scholarship on how excluded communities have built for themselves health-sustaining commons in responses to pandemic threats to health. I argue that creating opportunities for a 'COVID-19 commons' that can enlarge capacity for citizenly deliberation on how they have been governed and other pandemic related matters is vital for the development of more ethical and equitable post-pandemic politics.

Keywords: COVID-19; pandemics; media; narrative; commons

This paper reflects on the political effects of 'live with the virus' narratives associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Politicians, experts and media professionals have used these narratives to move publics through the pandemic, to encourage citizens to set aside uncertainty and pursue consent for how the pandemic should be managed. Consider this fragment from a news item in *The Independent*, reporting on UK prime minister Boris Johnson's advice for the British public in the run up to winter in 2021:

> "The pandemic is far from over, but thanks to our phenomenal vaccine programme, new treatments and testing, we are able to live with the virus without significant restrictions on our freedoms", said the prime minister. (Woodcock 2021)

'Live with the virus' verges on master narrative (Bamberg and Andrews 2004; McLean and Syed 2015) in the sense that it seeks to shape how individuals should think and feel about how life is to be lived. It has ideological properties since it offers itself as a reflection on the order of life, while refusing debate on how life with the pandemic will be experienced by all. 'Live with the virus' in the quotation from Johnson is used to promise freedom through the technological mitigation of the impact of the virus. It also opposes life with the virus and lack of freedom, as if they are mutually exclusive. In terms of narrative on threats to health, 'live with the virus' mandates that the disruption brought about by the advent of the virus is to be reconciled with the practical considerations of life and therefore accepted. It is also used by some to authorise the relaxation of prevention efforts because to not do so it is too harmful for economic systems. It has the significant narrative effect of supposing a particular future and foreclosing others. Commonly, the phrase is also used to signify the view that social distancing and other pandemic control methods are too damaging for economies and are unrealistically absolutist because they pretend that life without the virus is possible. It is, in part, code for taking steps towards economic activity that will continue to circulate the virus, but it is also a deeply political instruction

for how we are to be governed in an apparently permanent state of co-existence with the virus. Microbiologists, of course, know that in a technical sense the virus is here to stay in some form and that living with that situation is irresistible. Viruses travel across species and through time, evolving in response to their environments, sharing genetic material between themselves and with other viruses. Epidemiologists and clinicians also know that the virus will produce death and disease for some time to come. But to ask all to live with the virus in a political sense is an altogether different prospect and warrants interrogation.

Pandemics are profoundly political phenomena and COVID-19 is no exception. Over the course of the pandemic, nation states and regional legislatures have varied—over geographical space and across pandemic time—in how they have combined economic governance with science-based public health measures designed to moderate the impact of the infection on individual and collective health. Some governments, for example, the US and the UK (Jasanoff et al. 2021), resisted the imposition of social distancing and masks in order to inhibit the transmission of the virus, but then adopted these tactics when it became clear that the virus was air-borne and hospital systems had become overwhelmed. Governments such as in China and Taiwan (Jasanoff et al. 2021), opted for early and hard social distancing—often referred to as lockdowns—because this method was thought to lead to better outcomes for the economy in the long run. Against scientific advice, political leaders, including the US president Donald Trump (BBC News 2020a), advocated for bogus cures or disputed the effectiveness of masks and lockdowns. Some governments, for example in Italy and Austria (Jasanoff et al. 2021), mis-managed communications on threat to life in ways that energised vaccine confusion and hesitancy. Protests have been staged in major cities to re-claim freedoms supposedly under threat by public health restrictions on movement and vaccine mandates. Social media brim with stories that resist science-based responses to the pandemic. But these stories are referenced and resisted by ones that promote solidarity, encourage vaccination and how to cope with lockdowns. How these pandemic elements—space, time, science, politics—have been assembled to generate effects in the health and wealth of the body politic during COVID-19 is the focus for what follows.

The 'live with the virus' narrative also depends for some of its social potency on the notion that the pandemic is unprecedented and that it therefore was not possible to prepare for what has happened. This discourse lends force to 'live with the virus', but it is also ethically troubling and, as we will see, glosses over the demonstrable links that the COVID-19 pandemic has with previous pandemics. While it is a health threat of great impact, COVID-19 is not unprecedented in an absolute sense and has characteristics that have been addressed in previous pandemics. One distinctive feature of this particular pandemic, then, is that the lessons of the past appear to have been overlooked or forgotten. The effects of these erasures need to be evaluated.

Partly explaining this pandemic amnesia, COVID-19 has arisen in a political context comprised of resurgent, twenty-first century national populism that has sought to weaken global civil society and helped to slow and complicate the global response. Some responses to the COVID-19 pandemic framed by neo-liberalism are also inclined to resist support for collective action and deepen risk individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and its associated inequities. At the same time, the flourishing of mathematical modelling in pandemic response planning has led to a focus on the presence and absence of infections and deaths (Davis 2021). Missing in this political and scientific framework are the social and cultural elements that make life with a virus bearable: social support, protection from prejudice, the means to take action, and the prevention of health inequity.

'Live with the virus' promises freedom from constraint but, due to the inevitable circulation of the virus, it also implies illness and death. To adopt this form of political reason makes it seem as if the death and adversity related to the pandemic is a cost naturally associated with the spread of the virus. This point of view overlooks what is known about how to prevent the transmission of the virus and protect vulnerable people. It is, therefore, a biopolitical rationality that refuses the application of reason and science to the betterment of the health and wealth of nations, a kind of anti-biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense

(Foucault 2007). As I discuss below, there is ample evidence that it is possible to manage the virus and also that without those efforts, the pandemic has worse effects for those who already face inequities in their capacity to avoid infection and, if and when they are, to cope with the infection. 'Live with the virus' narrative that resists knowledge that the pandemic can be managed encapsulates a politics that expands the privileges of some and deepens the suffering of others and is a dangerous settlement of the rights of some over others.

'Live with the virus' narrative, then, extends political reason that refuses to acknowledge how the health of one depends on the many. In his extensive analysis of the political and legal implications of the concept of immunity, Esposito (2013), shows how the assertion of immunity—in the legal sense of freedom from obligation to others—is bound into a paradoxical self-destruction. Esposito argues that the freedoms of some are tied to the consent of others, and to ignore this tie is to destroy the communal conditions that make freedom possible. He further argues that a vital politics is required to reverse these conditions:

> Now it is precisely on this terrain that the battle for an affirmative biopolitics must be braved and possibly won. It must start precisely by breaking the vise grip between public and private that threatens to crush the common, by seeking instead to expand the space of the common. The fight that has begun against the planned privatization of water, the battle over energy sources, or the one seeking to re-examine the patents granted by pharmaceutical companies that prevent the distribution of cheaper medicines in the poorer areas of the planet all go in this direction. (Esposito 2013, p. 89)

Esposito and similarly Thomas Lemke (Lemke 2010), argue for affirmative biopolitics that extend the benefits of freedom without eroding its source in the common good. An affirmative biopolitical approach could acknowledge and strengthen the social ties that make effective responses to pandemics possible. Building on this concept of interdependent life, Mbembe (2021) has noted that the COVID-19 pandemic is part of a more general depletion of life sustaining conditions. In Australia, for example, citizens facing bushfires in late 2019 and early 2020 wore masks to protect themselves from smoke. They donned masks again in 2020 to reduce the transmission of the virus, suggesting how the taken-for-grantedness of breathing freely is circumscribed in multiple ways. For Mbembe, then, the value of the common good extends to the biosphere and its vital interconnectedness. Corinne Squire (this volume) explains that affirmative biopolitics might not only be found in direct resistance of hegemonic framings of how to 'live with the virus'. Tangential and 'alter' resistance are also possible ways around hegemony, expanding the range of tactical resistances that make life with the virus more tenable. Framed in terms of affirmative biopolitics and vital interdependence, 'live with the virus' narrative could be the basis for attending to how all can make it through the ordeal of transition to post-COVID-19 existence. I reflect on how responses to COVID-19 could more effectively assist individuals and communities to imagine sustainable post-COVID-19 futures.

In what follows, I explore 'live with the virus' narrative and its related amnesiac effects in four parts. I consider in more details how 'live with the virus' narratives intensify risk individualization, privilege and inequity. I then critique framings of the pandemic's unprecedented character, to show that this frame is unhelpfully partial and, in combination with 'live with the virus', is exercised to weaken political resistance to governmental (in)action. Building on this analysis, I develop an argument that 'live with the virus' and the unprecedented framings of the pandemic help to further a form of pandemic amnesia that erases the basis for political resistance. In the last section of the paper, I draw on Esposito and related scholarship on the common good and political resistance, to reflect on how the 'live with the virus' narrative could be turned in meaning to imply reflection on political circumstances and the development of ethical and just responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. 'Live with the Virus' Narratives and Risk Individualisation

'Live with the virus' contains within it an approach to the pandemic that has the effect of individualising risk (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). It accords with economic policy under advanced liberalism seeking to reduce the welfare state and most recently articulated as austerity (Viens 2019). In this governmental approach, state-supported public health systems are weakened, private providers expand their operation, and individuals are expected to undertake responsible management of health risks through lifestyle modification and insurance. In the UK, for example, it is estimated that public health budgets have been cut by 40% since 2013 and devolved to local authorities that have also experienced budget cuts (Lee et al. 2021), with consequences for the response to COVID-19. Risk individualisation draws attention to how the state extricates itself from involvement in assisting individuals to mitigate life risks. In these circumstances, the individual is expected to take on these risks for themselves. Risk individualisation can be distinguished from individualism, which concerns the emphasis given to the self-determining individual in liberal democracies. Risk individualisation is more specifically to do with the biographical trajectories of individuals facing the risks entailed in life choices that come to the fore under contracting welfarism and increased dependence on the resources the individual is able to command in their own right. Risk individualisation might seem like freedom for the privileged and affluent, but for those with fewer personal resources, it amounts to considerable constraint on life choices.

The assertion 'live with the virus', then, traffics into public policy a cruel individualisation of risk. For example, those whose employment allows them to easily work from home can establish social distancing to minimise the risk of viral transmission to family members. For those who have jobs that require them to be present at work—couriers, food production and delivery workers, cleaners—social distancing is less viable and therefore avoiding COVID-19 infection is more difficult to maintain. During the pandemic, some sectors of national economies have faced enormous income reduction and forced redundancies. Hospitality, entertainment and education sectors have faced these risks to income and wellbeing. Other sectors of the economy, however, have expanded and become more profitable, including corporations that deliver digital and material goods to households.

'Live with the virus' narrative also assumes that COVID-19 is the only health problem faced by individuals and communities. It is somewhat blind to the reality that some are already contending with other infectious diseases and health problems that make them more likely to be affected by the pandemic. People with immune dysfunction related chronic illness, for example diabetes, liver and kidney disease, autoimmune disease and respiratory diseases are more likely to have severe COVID-related illness, die or have long term effects (Callender et al. 2020). Cancer patients with COVID-19 and from lower economic status have been found to have higher risk of death (Ospina et al. 2021). Individuals with these conditions are already subject to economic hardship, features of their lives that are exacerbated by the pandemic. To say 'live with the virus' might suit those who are relatively privileged in economic and health terms, and therefore able to respond to the virus in ways that reduce their risks. But this approach may not make practical sense for individuals and communities already facing health challenges due to infectious diseases or health conditions that intersect with them.

There is ample evidence that the effects of the pandemic are felt unequally between and within societies. Epidemiological research of national data in the US shows that lower income and education was associated with risk of death with COVID-19 infection (Karmakar et al. 2021). UK research tracking clinical outcomes among blood donors found that age, male sex and Black ethnicity were associated with increased mortality related to COVID-19 infection (Elliott et al. 2021). Additionally, in the UK, 'live with the virus' was linked with the cessation of access to free COVID-19 testing (Limb 2022), deepening structures of inequitable access to the means to effectively manage one's risk. Narrative research with people living with HIV in the UK shows how the pandemic complicated and interrupted psychosocial supports, deepening precarities and multiplying healthcare

challenges (Squire, this volume). These patterns of illness, death and reduced capacity to take action indicate how social conditions shape risk and therefore point to the need for efforts to reduce such risks. Moreover, knowledge of long COVID and how COVID-19 infection interacts with other health problems is likely to emerge over time. Given what is already apparent and what we know of other infectious diseases, that is, the biological and social syndemics that characterise HIV, TB, Zika and malaria, among other diseases, it is likely that COVID-19 will become a significant factor in health inequity. These inequity producing impacts of COVID-19 are bracketed aside by 'live with the virus' narrative, implying that it is a policy framing blind to the deepening of inequity.

'Live with the virus' is an opportunity afforded to those with privileged capacity to remain disease free without government help in the form of economic support for public health measures. To ask all to 'live with the virus' may be viable for some, but for others adds considerably to the burden of illness that they face.

2. A Pandemic without Precedent?

A common theme in public discourse on the pandemic is its apparently unprecedented quality. A report published by the European regional office of the WHO was titled 'An unprecedented challenge: Italy's first response to COVID-19' (Regional Office for Europe, World Health Organization 2020). News media has also circulated 'unprecedented' to describe the pandemic. The conservative Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, prefaced in this way an announcement of a large package of financial aid during widespread lockdowns:

> With the twin battles that we face, and that we fight, against a virus and against the economic ruin that it can threaten. This calls for unprecedented action. Governments making decisions like they never have before. And today our government has made a decision today and that I announce today that no government has made before in Australia in response to crises such as these. And I hope and pray they never have to again. (Channel 9 News 2020)

The statement revealed that a focus on economic imperatives was paramount for the government. The scale of the support—some $130 billion AUD (Office of the Prime Minister of Australia 2020)—was justified by reference to the concept of 'unprecedented crisis', though there is some ambiguity as the audience is left to wonder if the crisis is mostly viral or economic. The aid package mirrored action taken by governments across the globe and to some extent can be seen as an effort to protect citizens from the pandemic, to make it easier for them to social distance and therefore to shore up the common good. However, it is also clear in this particular statement that the support was seen to be unprecedented. It was a disruption to government as normal. For example, the turn of phrase "I hope and pray they never have to do this again" implies that in normal circumstances the government should not take these steps to protect business and therefore the livelihoods of Australian citizens. The statement can be read as making reference to a crisis for favoured public sector austerity policy. The crisis is a reputational one for the status of conservative government as the rightful stewards of austerity. The aid package, then, was the exception that proves the rule of austerity policy. It has also been suggested that the aid package benefited employers as the payments went to corporations and secondarily to their employees (Butler 2021).

These ways of framing the pandemic help to give impetus to 'live with the virus' narrative, specifically, that unprecedented conditions have to be accepted. There is no doubt that the COVID19 pandemic has features and effects that need to be reckoned with, but it is also important to understand how social and political responses to this virus have genealogies in previous socio-political configurations of infectious threats to life. That which makes the COVID-19 pandemic distinctive can be better understood if these qualities are examined in light of what we know of previous pandemic threats. It is valuable, for instance, to reflect on how previous responses to infectious diseases have articulated pandemic space and time with science and politics. This analytical project could help to temper somewhat the recourse to the language of a pandemic without precedence

and its now familiar cousin, 'live with the virus' narrative and its amnesiac and political ramifications.

The 1918–1919 influenza pandemic is often said to be the touchstone for discourse on pandemic threats. Coming at the end of the WWI, the pandemic is thought to have reached across the world within a year and eventually led to the deaths of an estimated 50 million people (Taubenberger and Morens 2006). It can also be said that accepted scientific knowledge of pandemics can be traced into the events of 1918–1919. Due to its global scale, the pandemic generated extensive mortality data, some of which has been used by epidemiologists and mathematical modellers to examine how various public health approaches to the prevention of the infection impacted on deaths (Bootsma and Ferguson 2007; Ferguson et al. 2006). Modellers considered death notifications over time in particular cities in the US to assess the effect of different approaches to social distancing on viral transmission, in particular, comparing cities that adopted wide-scale cessation of public events with cities that adopted less rigorous social distancing. This research helped to provide a scientific basis for the concept of social distancing. Pandemic preparedness and response plans generated by nation states in the 2000s have drawn on these models and can therefore be construed to connect back to the 1918–1919 pandemic (United Kingdom Department of Health 2007; Australian Department of Health and Ageing 2008). Social distancing, in part founded on data generated from attempts by cities to manage the spread of H1N1 virus in 1918–1919, have helped to shape the evidence base used to guide the management of COVID-19.

In addition to its effects in the science of social distancing and pandemic preparedness, the 1918–1919 pandemic was briefly echoed in an outbreak that occurred in the 1970s US and related considerations of trust in scientific authority (Neustadt and Fineberg 1983). In 1976, it was discovered that an H1N1 virus—the same virus type that led to the 1918–1919 pandemic—had led to an unusually high number of deaths in a short period of time. Authorities, worried about a resurgent H1N1 pandemic similar in scale to 1918–1919, embarked on an ambitious programme to vaccinate the entire population. Unfortunately, the vaccine chosen was found to be associated with an elevated incidence of Guillain Barre syndrome, an autoimmune disorder. The vaccine programme was ceased in the face of media outcry and the pandemic itself turned out to be less severe than first thought. These difficulties with the management of the 1976 H1N1 pandemic, the vaccine used to prevent it, and media responses have become something akin to public health lore, framing how the international community of public health experts have addressed subsequent outbreaks. Fineberg, one of the co-authors of the book about the 1976 outbreak—*The Epidemic That Never Was: Policy-making and the Swine Flu Scare*—was commissioned by the WHO to review the management of the 2009–2010 influenza pandemic (World Health Organization 2011), which also involved the H1N1 influenza virus type. The example of the 1976 H1N1 outbreak underscores the heated politics of pandemic responses and therefore how COVID-19 is not strictly without precedence.

The COVID-19 pandemic also arises in what has been said to be a period of resurgent infectious diseases (Zumla and Hui 2019). Commencing in the early 1980s, the HIV/AIDS pandemic presented as a deeply complex biomedical, scientific, social and political public health challenge (Epstein 1996). In this period, too, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) emerged as a health crisis implicated in practices of food meat production in Europe (Pattison 1998; van Zwanenberg and Millstone 2002). Multi-drug resistant tuberculosis emerged as a widespread clinical problem by the 1990s, shaded by social and regional health care inequities (Keshavjee and Farmer 2012). Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aurea was detected in hospitals in the 1990s and became a high profile news story by the mid 2000s (Washer and Joffe 2006).

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 (Lee et al. 2005) is another important context for COVID-19, for biological and public policy reasons. SARS is a coronavirus, as is COVID-19, and led to harsh lockdowns of affected communities in Hong Kong (Baehr 2006) and Toronto (Sanford and Ali 2005). SARS generated knowledge of the

potential severity of coronaviruses and experts worried that a more easily transmissible variant could have devastating effects, akin to 1918–1919 (World Health Organization 2011). The potential danger that the SARS outbreak indicated, coming on top of the infectious diseases concerns of the previous decades, led the global health system to place an increased focus on pandemic preparedness. The WHO strengthened the International Health Regulations which required member states to create national and regional pandemic preparedness plans (World Health Organization 2011).

Pandemics and outbreaks have followed with some regularity. The 2009 swine flu (H1N1) pandemic was the first post-SARS pandemic to be addressed using international and national pandemic preparedness plans (World Health Organization 2009). The 2009 pandemic outbreak was initially the focus for intense media attention and public health responses, but like the H1N1 outbreak in 1976, proved to be of mild severity for most people in the long run. The swine flu pandemic meant that experts and governments had to once again work hard to manage public expectations, explaining how the infection was a threat to only some but that overtime it could evolve into a more serious health threat. In 2014, a serious outbreak of Ebola emerged in west Africa (World Health Organization 2014) and led to some criticism of the international response (Kamradt-Scott 2016). In 2016, Zika emerged in South America (Chan 2016; Fauci and Morens 2016) after it was first detected in Africa in 1947 (Singer 2016).

COVID-19, then, is not absolutely unprecedented. It is framed by the spectre of a lethal global pandemic that occurred in the second decade of the twentieth century. The imaginary of pandemic devastation has been coupled with the data that the 1918–1919 pandemic generated about the effectiveness of public health measures, knowledge that has persisted in public health science and pandemic preparedness and into the response to COVID-19. Experiences with previous infections have also generated knowledge about the need to manage news media and the public sphere and how infectious diseases inequities are shaped by the structures of social inequality, political power, and social abjection.

What does make COVID-19 distinctive in light of this pandemic history is how slow and variable has been the response of nations. The World Health Organization moved quite quickly to encourage the global response. They declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 (Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness 2020), under the International Health Regulations that had been established in 2005 in response to SARS. On 11 March, the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 was pandemic (World Health Organization 2020). For comparison, the 2009 influenza pandemic was declared a PHEIC on 25 April 2009 and a pandemic on 11 June (World Health Organization 2011), a slightly longer period of time. The World Health Organization (2022) and the United Nations (2021) also offered guidance on how to respond to the pandemic that called on knowledge and expertise garnered in experience of previous pandemics.

Despite this pre-existing knowledge and contemporary guidance, national responses to COVID-19 appeared to depart from the apparently coordinated action taken in 2009 and 2010, perhaps for political reasons. The 2009 influenza pandemic coincided with the centre left governments of Barak Obama in the US, Gordon Brown in the UK and Kevin Rudd in Australia. COVID-19 coincided with conservative governments in the UK and Australia and Trump in the US. Particularly in relation to Trump but also in other nations, the pandemic was met with the populist turn in politics and a related weakening of commitments to global civil society organisations like the World Health Organization. For example, in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic the US president Donald Trump sought to withdraw the US government from funding the World Health Organization (BBC News 2020b). In some nations, notably the US, The Philippines and Brazil, leaders articulated 'medical populism' (Lasco 2020, p. 1417) eschewing science, promoting unproven cures and fomenting mistrust of expert knowledge systems. Donald Trump, for example, famously advocated that citizens might inject bleach to cure their COVID-19 infection (BBC News 2020a). The absence of leadership in Brazil is said to have galvanised a civil society

response comprised of NGOs, local health services, and universities (Ortega and Behague 2022). In the UK, a senior government advisor, Dominic Cummings, travelled across the country during lockdown, therefore flouting public health requirements (Fancourt et al. 2020). Exposed by news media to public outcry, Cummings's action and later the 'partygate' scandal underlined the UK government's somewhat faltering commitment to the containment of the pandemic.

The confluence of pandemic amnesia with the deconstruction of global civil society institutions, populism and communities left to their own devices has given COVID-19 some of its specific character. To say that the pandemic is unprecedented and that we have to learn to live with it is a kind of laziness in the sense that it ignores what is known, the evidence that exists and the richly nuanced expertise of infectious diseases that is at hand. 'Live with the virus' narrative in this view signals not having really addressed the pandemic in the ways we could have done. The amnesiac response to COVID-19 points to the political landscape in which the pandemic emerged, one that endorses a refusal of pandemic pasts.

3. Pandemic Amnesia and the Erasure of Political Resistance

The pandemic amnesia entailed in 'live with the virus' narrative might also have the effect of weakening the basis by which it is possible to reflect on what has happened, both in terms of lived experience and for governance. One of narratives' richest properties is that they provide symbolic structures for accounting for the relationship between the past and present and therefore how the future might be entered into political reason. Narratives provide cultural means by which individuals can evaluate what has happened and on that basis embark on reparation and restitution, or if that is not possible, settle on acceptable new ways of life (Frank 1995). By marking shared history, narratives can also provide the basis for collective memory and political action (McAuley 2021). 'Live with the virus' narrative in most of its expressions appears to foreclose these political possibilities.

Pandemics vary, of course, but they frequently accord with the general narrative structure of setting, event and aftermath. An outbreak of some kind emerges in a community or population, wreaks effects, and then subsides. A pandemic is axiomatically an event in time where ways of life and social norms are suspended until it is possible to return to life as it more or less once was. This pandemic structure has been inscribed and reworked to the point that it is understood as a narrative genre that links diverse media, including, novels, online games, television series and films (Davis 2017; Wald 2008). The close alignment of pandemics with generic narrative structure may be one reason why stories about pandemics and pandemic-like threats are extensively inscribed and circulated in literature and popular culture.

The pandemic narrative structure of an infection that comes and goes offers the opportunity for deliberation and healing. Considering a pandemic past from the standpoint of the present makes it possible to reflect on what happened and evaluate the practical and ethical values of courses of action, and to pursue the healing of lives, relationships and collective existence (Frank 1995; Hyden and Brockmeier 2008; Davis and Lohm 2020). The capacity to look back is also a valuable tool for deliberative and democratic engagement with the modes of governance citizens are encouraged to accept, particularly if these methods of administration are implicated in the inequitable distribution of pandemic harms and the resources that may moderate them. A pandemic that does not accord with this pattern—one that is a more or less permanent state of affairs—requires different methods for reflection, evaluation, collective memory and political engagement. In this light, to say we all have to learn to 'live with the virus' without critical reflection places COVID-19 beyond reparation or restitution. It is vital that 'live with the virus' narratives are opened up to possibilities for healing.

The capacity for reflective deliberation on how a threat to health—most keenly one that is shaded by deep inequity and disinterested leadership—is vital for the survival of affected individuals and communities. Grattan (2019) has made an argument that ACT-UP

was an early form of HIV activism that helped to constitute a 'queer commons' in the face of governmental inaction (Butt and Millner-Larsen 2018). By this he meant the making visible of dissenting politics about HIV's inequities, the grassroots responses of affected communities building alliances with agencies of civil society to provide education, care and support, and lobbying for treatments research and access. The political action of ACT-UP in the late 1980s and 1990s (Crimp 2002; Treichler 1999) comprised an important means of defending the health of populations in political circumstances where the rights of sexual and drug using minorities were under attack. As Douglas Crimp (2002) noted, the shame and stigma attached to AIDS made it difficult to mourn the loss of life. ACT-UP and similar community acitivism made it more possible to grieve and memorialise the loss of loved ones in ways not otherwise possible. In this light, it is important to ask if imperatives to live with the coronavirus make it possible or difficult to mourn in ways that provide the basis for healing, particularly for those individuals and groups more deeply affected by the pandemic.

Like Esposito, previously discussed, Grattan argues that the queer commons has been erased in public policy through a gradual process of revisionism by the medical establishment typified by biomedical discourse on the passing of HIV exceptionalism (Bayer and Fairchild 2006; De Cock and Johnson 1998) and the increasing intensity of austerity and risk individualisation in public policy. Grattan argues that being unable to reflect on this activist past has significant political effects:

> I am beginning from the premise that remembrances of AIDS and AIDS activism in the United States have been willfully occluded through a series of narrative tactics of forgetting, reimagining, and denying. Like many ideological structures, the sinister recedes into the natural, and forgetting occurs not on the level of an active engagement but from the grounds that there was never anything to remember in the first place. I see revisiting ACT-UP as the beginning of a project of archival recovery, but also an affective provocation. Crucially, the elision of AIDS activism, and the pressures of the AIDS epidemic more broadly, from popular social memory is an act of enforced forgetting that functions symptomatically to illustrate the ways a commons is often forcibly enclosed. (Grattan 2019, pp. 127–28)

Grattan invites us, then, to consider how the erasure of the history of AIDS activism is not simply a matter of moving on, but also a profoundly political erasure of the foundation upon which the quest for equity and justice is made possible. This is also Esposito's point (2011) in relation to his political philosophy of *immunitas*, understood as the suspension of obligations to collective life and, therefore, a privileged release of the self to self-interest. Taken to its logical extension, however, immunity takes on a paradoxical quality as to forget that the source of one's freedom is a privilege that is bestowed by collective existence is to trouble the conditions of one's freedom. 'Live with the virus' offers citizens freedom, but also asks them to forget how it is possible to take that course of action and ignore how the privilege of self-determination comes with the devaluing of the conditions that make effective social responses to pandemics possible.

HIV provides additional lessons for how it might be possible to 'live with the virus.' HIV does not fit with the idealised pandemic narrative of before and after, but it does draw attention to the vital politics of ethical and just social responses. For individuals affected by HIV, diagnosis and its aftermath can be an important focus for experiential narrative on recollection and futures (Squire 2007; Barraso 1997; Roth and Nelson 1997). The example of ACT-UP and similar grassroots responses to this health threat showed how to address some of the inequities that the infection produced. The 'HIV commons' built by this action in different parts of the world have made it possible to advocate for treatment access and to roll it out when it became available (Davis and Squire 2010). In South Africa, shared narratives on living with HIV became the way of sustaining individuals and communities in face of stigma and discrimination (Mbali 2013; Robins 2006; Squire 2007). Squire's analysis of post COVID-19 narratives amongst people with HIV (this volume) underlines

how living with HIV is undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic but also a source for resisting the hegemonic framing of how to live with the coronavirus.

Expectations that citizens ought to 'live with COVID-19', then, raise questions with regard to when and how it will be possible to take up the vantage point of critical reflection or, as in the case of HIV, how individuals and communities will be able to assert and protect their rights to health. This negation of critical reflection on life's circumstances has significant political resonances. Reflecting on the severity of the Omicron variant in late 2021, the Australian prime minister was quoted as saying:

> "Our plan is to keep moving forward, not to go back. We're not looking in the rear vision mirror. We're not going back to what Australians have had to go through. We're going to go forward and we're going to live with this virus." (Piovesan 2021)

This advice links the expectation that citizens should 'live with the virus' and a metaphorical cessation of hindsight. It asks citizens to not consider the merits and harms of how the pandemic has previously been managed and therefore endorse a particular way of 'living with the virus', effectively erasing the possibility for political debate and the basis for political resistance.

'Live with the virus' portends fewer options for democratic engagement with the conditions of our existence. In time of excessive austerity and the hyper risk individualisation that have contributed to the pandemic, it is important to create the capacity to assess these circumstances. This is particularly the case since some turnings of 'live with the virus' narrative instruct citizens to not look back on what has happened and not question the circumstances that are upon them.

4. Affirmative Biopolitics for the COVID-19 Commons

Exhortations to 'live with the virus' bracket aside the complexities and uncertainties of efforts to prevent the transmission of the virus through public health measures, as if those have proven impractical or impossible to implement. It is a turn of phrase that simplifies and reduces, and so incanted casts a paralysing spell on its alterities and perhaps even over those who might seek to question or resist it. It is a phrase that turns away from efforts to resist the virus and implies acceptance of the view that it is possible to only mitigate the pandemic. Tacit also in 'live with the virus' is an acceptance of mortality, since to weaken or even forgo prevention—until such time as vaccines and antiviral treatments are able to prevent it—death of some is expected. It appears to admit that deaths related to COVID-19 have to be accepted despite evidence that social and political conditions shape risk for infection and mortality. In some uses, 'live with the virus' narrative is retrograde, anti-biopolitics in that it pretends that life is shaped by fate and not by science and politics. There is little promise in 'live with the virus' other than a reduction in the economic costs of public health and a tacit neo-liberalised individualisation of risk. 'Live with the virus' is the favoured clarion call for those seeking to exercise their privileged wealth and health over the needs of the less advantaged. In this sense, 'live with the virus' is optimistic/tragic master narrative since it proposes a method of pandemic life that assures privileges and disadvantages measured in life and death.

'Live with the virus' is made possible, too, by its close alignment with forms of pandemic amnesia. The common use of 'unprecedented' and other modes of COVID-19 exceptionalism, underline this willful forgetting. Pandemic amnesia has the effect of ignoring the inconvenient evidence, knowledge and understanding that has been accumulated over the decades, at least, since the 1918/1919 influenza pandemic. It borrows from the 'medical populism' that has emerged in the public discourse on COVID-19 (Lasco 2020). 'Live with the virus' combined with pandemic amnesia denudes public life of opportunities for the reflective appraisal of how citizens have been governed, the collective basis for political resistance, and how life with the virus could be made more just and equitable.

It might be possible, however, to turn what it means to 'live with the virus'. Digesting and creatively adapting this particular narrative could be a way of exploring, debating

and imagining how post-COVID-19 lives can be shaped to advantage. Remembering what is known about pandemics and, in particular, how they exaggerate social and health inequity could radically alter the meaning of 'live with the virus'. Calls to live with the virus could be cause to reflect on how this might be possible and, therefore, the ethics of policy settings and messaging and how to strengthen efforts to reduce health economic and related syndemic inequities (Singer 2016). Precisely in the face of failed leadership during the pandemic, formations of 'COVID-19 commons' have arisen through the building of alliances across civil society and local, community organizing (Ortega and Behague 2022). These experiments with how to live with the virus provide ways of resisting the foreclosure of deliberative reflection on political conditions post-pandemic.

'Live with the virus' narrative also needs to be interrogated for the politics of health and wealth it traffics at the expense of community life. Esposito's (2011) political philosophy suggests that to refuse the collective conditions that make self-determination possible—that is, the freedom to live with the virus in the body politic—ultimately makes life unlivable. There is urgent need to reflect on the conditions of our political existence, share stories of 'how to live with the virus' in acceptable ways and acknowledge the multiplicity of privilege and disadvantage. Action like this could help to strengthen ways and means of building lives post-COVID-19. 'Live with the virus' could become—not an instruction to forget—but a source of healing and political action, as it has been for infections like HIV. This kind of retrospective narrating of pandemics would comprise investment in the material and symbolic means of social public health and the amelioration of inequity.

Pandemics test societies in many ways and COVID-19 tests nations, communities and individuals greatly. Amongst these challenges is ensuring that the pandemic is not used by some to erase affirmative biopolitics and creating a 'COVID-19 commons' through which it might be possible to live with the virus, justly and equitably.

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Article

Building Consensus during Racially Divisive Times: Parents Speak Out about the Twin Pandemics of COVID-19 and Systemic Racism

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Abstract: This paper utilizes narrative inquiry to examine the effect of COVID-19 on political resistance, focusing on education as a key site. Based on survey and interview data the paper considers parents' perspectives about the impacts of COVID-19 and racial inequalities in their children's schooling. Two narrative types are constructed and analyzed: consensus narratives and parenting narratives that refute an overarching, manufactured political narrative in the United States of "divisiveness" about race and education, while also identifying the layers and complexities of individual parents' everyday lives raising and educating children.

1. Introduction

2020 was a pivotal year of ruptures. The COVID-19 pandemic and global Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), together surfaced deeply rooted inequities and divisiveness, which have revitalized debates about schooling and its purpose. This paper draws on a project *COVID-19 & Racial Justice in Urban Education: New York City (NYC) Parents Speak Out*, which explores the experiences and perspectives of parents and guardians during the unprecedented school year of 2020–2021. The mixed method study of interactive survey and interview data asked three questions: How do NYC parents/guardians identify and understand the impacts of COVID-19 and racial inequalities on their children's schooling? How do parents make sense of and respond to the challenges? What are their commonalities and differences?

This Special Issue explores the usefulness of narrative inquiry as an effective tool for examining political resistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our paper contributes to this effort in two ways: first, by identifying education as a key site of resistance and focusing in on the twin impacts of COVID-19 and racial harm and violence on children's schooling from parents' perspectives; and second by introducing a unique mixed methodology that examines the relationship between two types of narratives—*consensus narratives* that we identified in the interactive survey results and *parenting narratives* constructed from the interview data.

Our discussion and analysis of the consensus narratives paint an important picture of parents' desires for change in schools. We feature a parent alliance around teaching about race, racism and inclusion, which refutes an overarching, manufactured political narrative of "divisiveness" about race and education. We found that overall, parents support opening up, rather than closing down, school conversations about hard and uncomfortable histories and realities that children should learn. To flesh out and understand the complexities of this alliance, we analyze three parenting narratives, highlighting the concerns of individual parents as they pursue their desires for change about how their children learn about racism. Careful listening to these parents' stories of everyday events demonstrates how they use

identity building tools and position themselves in multiple ways to reflect on the goal of teaching racial justice. Together, these two narrative types are in dialogue, building toward, rather than away from, consensus, which in itself is a lever for change. In this paper we set the context, unpack the research methods and design (complete with statements, participant characteristics, and opinion groups), and share findings grounded in consensus narratives and narrative inquiry.

2. Setting the Context

In March 2020, when New York City (NYC) became an early epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NYC Department of Education (DOE), the United States' (U.S.) largest public school system with approximately 1.1 million students, along with charter, catholic, and other NYC schools, went fully remote as the city went into lockdown. In school systems all across the world, in the midst of uncertainty and anxiety, students and their families were forced to manage the challenges of the pandemic, including the trauma of sickness and death, while adapting to online learning along with their teachers and administrators. Many households had several children learning remotely alongside parents working remotely. For NYC parents and guardians who returned to work in person in fall 2020, finding childcare for their children during the school day became an urgent need.

People of color and those living in poverty were the most adversely impacted by the pandemic with higher rates of cases, mortality and a rapid rate of infection (Bambra et al. 2020). The impact of these disparities made decision-making all the more fraught with challenges as school districts struggled to meet the unique needs of families across regional, racial and economic lines. These disparities shaped parents' decisions about sending children back to school for fear of putting family members at-risk. Racial differences about school safety and precautions became evident, especially in NYC, according to polling.[1]

Meanwhile, racist rhetoric about the cause of the pandemic was mobilized against Asian Americans. At the outset of the pandemic, then-President Trump referred to COVID-19 as "the Chinese virus" and "Kung Flu", placing the blame for the virus on Chinese people. As a result, Asian-American communities began to see an uptick in racism, both online and in person (Gao and Sai 2021; Zhu 2020; Cheng and Conca-Cheng 2020) and Anti-Asian racism peaked in NYC. Then, on 25 May 2020, while the city and much of the country was still in lockdown, George Floyd—and unarmed Black man—was murdered after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground under the knee of a white police officer. The episode was captured on video and went viral, igniting protests that spread throughout the country and globally in the months that followed, leading to a racial justice movement not seen since the Civil Rights protests of the 1960s. More murders by police officers followed, including Brianna Taylor—a young unarmed Black woman—in Louisville, KY, who was mistakenly shot and killed by police officers, while they executed an unconstitutional search warrant in a failed raid with deadly consequences.

An important layer of resistance within the "pandemic story" and its racialized impact is that many schools *did* successfully add an increased emphasis on race, racism and racial justice—even during the challenges of COVID-19. This included a more expansive and multi-perspective history of slavery and recognizing and celebrating the contributions of people of color. By 2021, many U.S. school districts had adopted Culturally Responsive and Sustaining frameworks[2] that acknowledge the importance of race and racism and its harms (roughly 900 districts that service about 35% of the U.S. student population) (See Pollock et al. (2022)). Furthermore, with an increased focus on racial inequity, long-standing discrepancies in discipline, surveillance and the punishment of Black and Brown students came under new scrutiny in districts across the nation (Annamma and Stovall 2020). In addition to schools adding an increased emphasis on race, racism and racial justice, Chris Malore reported on a 2020 OnePoll study that, "Aside from COVID-19, the biggest talking point for families is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and race-related issues." The survey found about seven in ten parents have talked to their children about BLM and

racism in America. Two in three parents have also talked to their kids about police brutality (Melore 2020).

These efforts notwithstanding, what captured media attention and set new terms for public debate was the conservative backlash, and its narrative framed around a distortion of "Critical Race Theory" (CRT) and its incorporation in schools (a catch-all term for teaching about race, racism, diversity and inclusion) (Kaplan and Owings 2021). Anti-CRT campaigns mounted by some parents, conservative media outlets and state legislatures, stoked fears that schools are using BLM to "push an ideology through a curriculum" (Sitter 2021), and using CRT to racially divide the country and make white students feel bad about themselves. Such campaigns took cues from a Republican Texas state lawmaker's proposal to ban a list of 850 books[3] in schools and libraries that "might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress because of their gender or race." A report released by Pollock et al. (2022) "The Conflict Campaign" provides extensive research on anti-CRT efforts at the local district level, documenting bans, misrepresentations, distortions and threats, creating a hostile environment for discussions of race, racism and racial inequality and, more broadly, diversity and inclusion. In Florida and Texas, under the guise of "student religious freedoms," an effort to ban discussion of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people or gender expansiveness in what are being dubbed "Don't Say Gay" bills, have features which parallel the manufactured CRT conflict.

The U.S. was (and continues to be) not alone in these political debates. Similar anti-CRT discussions were taking place across Europe and in most postcolonial/decolonial contexts. For example, in the United Kingdom (U.K.) leaders threatened to deny funding for programs and museums if they removed problematic statues in Ireland. In England, the Department of Education prohibited schools from using "materials produced by anti-capitalist groups, or teaching "victim narratives that are harmful to British society" (Trilling 2020). BLM leaders were accused by U.K. parliamentarians of "having strayed beyond what should be a powerful yet simple and unifying message in opposition to the racism that still exists in our society, into cultural Marxism, the abolition of the nuclear family, defunding the police and overthrowing capitalism" (Trilling 2020). There is explicit mention of the continual existence of racism, yet programs, schools and other entities were prohibited from candidly addressing race and the manifestation of problematic histories.

3. The Research and Its Mixed-Methods Design

A team of researchers in the Urban Education Ph.D. program of the Graduate Center, City University of New York, gathered in the summer of 2020 to lift up parents' perspectives which aretoo often neglected in school policy decision-making. Given all the uncertainty plaguing families with children in school, we designed a study to explore five main topics about parents' views on: school access, operations and communication; curriculum and instruction (including remote and in-person instruction as well as teaching about race, racism and protest); family hardship and loss; and issues of educational equity, specifically racial equity. The team designed a two-stage study beginning with an on-line interactive web-based survey (n = 217) using Pol.is, an interactive survey tool, followed by individual and small-group interviews (n = 22). The survey was offered in English, Spanish and Chinese. Parents were recruited through a snowball technique of personal contacts, educational advocacy organizations, school sites, and social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. After completing the survey, parents had the option to participate in an interview to share their personal experiences and respond to survey data results.

3.1. Pol.is

Pol.is, an innovative, participatory and open-source survey tool gathers and analyses input from people "in their own words, enabled by advanced statistics and machine learning" as described by the designers http://pol.is/home (accessed on 8 May 2020). Participants respond (agree, disagree, or pass) to statements on the survey (i.e., "seed

statements" entered by researchers). Participants can submit statements of their own, which are immediately added to the survey to which new participants respond. This feature makes it possible for people to change the direction of a conversation, adding topics that researchers may have missed. Our survey started with 25 statements and grew to 91 statements. These additional statements opened up a more robust and/or refined set of opinions that expanded the conversation. Comments submitted by participants can capture a majority (above 50%), or a supermajority (between 67% and 90%), or nearly everyone in the survey as having the same viewpoint.

3.2. Participant Characteristics

Pol.is surveys also include "meta-statements" to help discern certain characteristics of respondents. Our survey collected data on three main characteristics: household economic stability/precarity; school type (public, private, charter); and children's age range (PreK-5th grade (ages 3–11) and 6th grade to 12th grade (ages 12–18).[4] We learned that the participant pool was divided equally between parents with children of the two age groups; most had children attending public school. The vast majority of respondents were employed with access to health care, but some did report experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19, which is discussed more in the next section.

3.3. Opinion Groups

Pol.is uses a crowd sourcing mechanism and algorithm https://compdemocracy. org/algorithms/ (accessed on 8 May 2020) to find "opinion groups" and to surface what each opinion group has in common according to meta-statements. Our survey findings identified three opinion groups: Group A were those who were most concerned about racial inequality and its messaging in school; this group reported the most financial hardship (63%). Group B were those most in favor of in-person learning and schools remaining open; this group consisted of families with the youngest children. Within Group B, 92% agreed with the statement "Early learners need in-person school to learn to read and develop vital social skills. Remote learning is not developmentally appropriate". Group C were most in favor of on-line learning (75% reported that remote learning should be a future option post COVID-19). This group consisted of families with children of mixed ages who attended more varied school types (but public school still predominated). Figure 1 below visually represents how Pol.is reports out survey findings, in this case illustrating how the three opinion groups responded to five different statements.
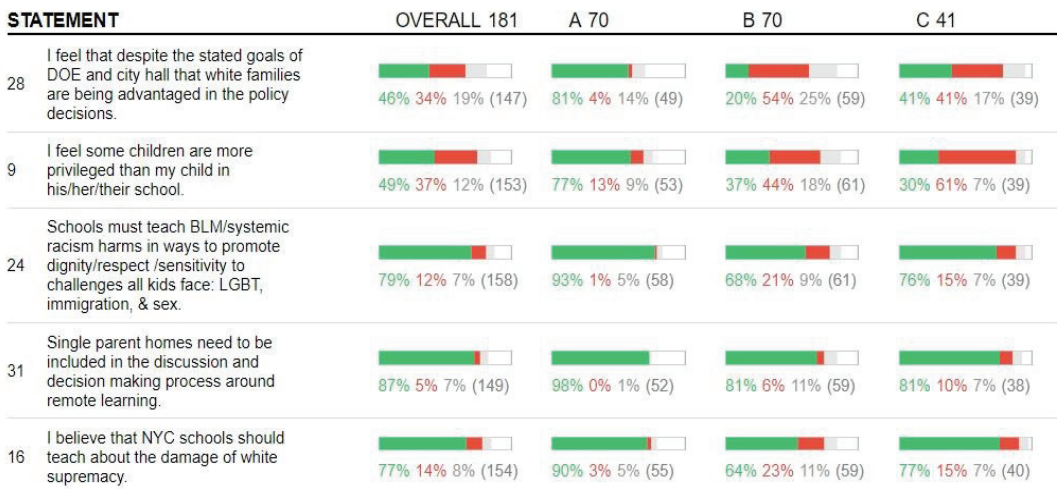

STATEMENT		OVERALL 181	A 70	B 70	C 41
28	I feel that despite the stated goals of DOE and city hall that white families are being advantaged in the policy decisions.	46% 34% 19% (147)	81% 4% 14% (49)	20% 54% 25% (59)	41% 41% 17% (39)
9	I feel some children are more privileged than my child in his/her/their school.	49% 37% 12% (153)	77% 13% 9% (53)	37% 44% 18% (61)	30% 61% 7% (39)
24	Schools must teach BLM/systemic racism harms in ways to promote dignity/respect /sensitivity to challenges all kids face: LGBT, immigration, & sex.	79% 12% 7% (158)	93% 1% 5% (58)	68% 21% 9% (61)	76% 15% 7% (39)
31	Single parent homes need to be included in the discussion and decision making process around remote learning.	87% 5% 7% (149)	98% 0% 1% (52)	81% 6% 11% (59)	81% 10% 7% (38)
16	I believe that NYC schools should teach about the damage of white supremacy.	77% 14% 8% (154)	90% 3% 5% (55)	64% 23% 11% (59)	77% 15% 7% (40)

Figure 1. Pol.is Survey Results.

Because our study aimed to make recommendations to policymakers and school leaders, we were most interested in the overall, aggregated survey data reporting the most agreed-upon statements as mandates for change (regardless of opinion groups). We reported these three mandates as recommendations for policymakers and school leaders to influence decision-making in the 2021 school year, also published on our website www. NYCparentSpeakOut.com (accessed on 9 September 2020).

4. Three Consensus Narratives: Mandates for Change

Acknowledging a broadening definition of what constitutes a narrative (Andrews et al. 2013; Riessman 2008; Phoenix 2020; Squire et al. 2014), we refer to a collection of the highest rated agreement statements as *consensus narratives.* We do this to capture the dynamic nature of participants' responses, associations, and connections to the survey. Because participants added statements, we could track how they were framing these issues in their own words.

Parent engagement: Only 29% of respondents agreed with the seed statement, "I feel I was included in the planning for the re-opening of my child's 2020–2021 school year." Participants added statements that indicated feeling left out or ignored. For example, 87% agreed, "Single families need to be included in the discussion and decision-making around remote learning" and "Parents/guardians need to be a part of the conversation regarding school closures and alternatives relating to learning" (85%) and "Working families' struggles are not being taken into account" (70%). "It is impossible for me to work full time and also assist my child with remote learning" (73%). There were also calls for more proactive Department of Education (DOE) solicitation of what "overworked caregivers need for respite" (87%). Parents wanted more input.

Social-emotional development and mental health needs: There was resounding agreement on mental health needs, a topic not originally included on the survey. A supermajority of parents agreed that "I feel there should be increased mental health supports (including non-traditional/group) for students due to social isolation from COVID" (91%). Whereas slightly more than half of respondents reported their children experiencing "significant learning loss" (a seed statement) many more parents expressed concern about their children's social-emotional development and general well-being. For example, a parent added statement, "While my children have not suffered academically, they have lacked the engagement and socialization required for children to flourish" had a higher percentage of agreement (65%).

Addressing racism: The consensus narrative about racism and racial inequality was the most pronounced and elaborated through additional parent statements. 77% of participants agreed that "schools should teach about the damages of white supremacy" and that "NYC schools should teach about the "Black Lives Matter" movement" (both seed statements). More agreement developed around the parent added statement: "schools must teach BLM/systemic racism harms and promote dignity/respect/sensitivity to challenges all kids face" (79%). This addition broadened the emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

Parents indicated that discussions were taking place about civil unrest in their children's schools; only 9% of parents said they had to "reached out to my child's teacher after noticing the teacher was ignoring the issue". Still, a third of parents expressed dissatisfaction with what was being covered: "My child's teacher has not addressed race or civil rights in their teaching, not even around the Martin Luther King holiday" or their child's teacher "was not implementing culturally responsive curriculum." These, as well as other added statements, built out a desire for curricular change about how and what to teach children about racism.

Participants also added statements about equity—"Inequality in the school system is tied to wealth of the local neighborhood. It creates advantages for students in rich neighborhoods" (88%). Interestingly, less than half of respondents agreed with the seed statement, "some children are more privileged than my child in his/her/their school" (49%). Pointedly, a majority of participants agreed with the following sentiment and

proposed solutions in a statement entered by one respondent: "NYC's segregated system is disgusting. White parents, Stop hoarding high performing schools; use that privilege; fight for NYS equal funding" (64%).

Parents were evenly split about special education and the role of "gifted programs"[5] in sustaining racial inequality. One parent statement pointed the finger at the NYC school system for fostering racial division: "NYC should stop pitting Asian Americans against African Americans and instead work to improve schools instead of dumbing them down" (51% agreed). Overall, there was a generative, if divided conversation about the sources and policy solutions to address racism. However, when it came to curricular demands about what children should be taught, there was more consensus than division.

This mandate for curricular change was striking, highlighting an intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic with its educational losses, anxieties and inequalities and the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter events that served as a collective reminder of systemic racism and what schools should do in response. These links become pronounced when analyzing individual parenting narratives to which we now turn. However, first, we offer a brief discussion of our approach to narrative theory and analysis as it relates specifically to interviews and social interactions.

5. Opening Up Counter-Storytelling, Multi-Positionality, and Race Talk

Narrative inquiry has been said to be especially important during times of rupture when lives are "interrupted" (Riessman 1993, 2008). Narrative theory assumes that speakers do more than describe particular facts about consequential events or experience. Speakers take their listeners inside, personal, and larger social worlds in order to make a point about themselves, their identities, relationships and values. Narrative analysis demands an attention to multi-positionality as interviewees shift from speaking to different audiences, including imagined audiences, who speakers might perceive as hostile, accepting and/or like-minded. In our interviews these shifts were important, as will become evident.

Counter-narratives are the "stories people tell and live [*that*] offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Bamberg and Andrews 2004, p. 1). We have argued that the consensus narratives counteract the dominant discourse of political divisiveness about teaching about racism. Listening for counter-narratives in interviews is more dialogic and intersubjective, produced as part of how speakers position themselves in their social worlds and relationship to others, including the interviewer (Gee 2011). Paying attention to a speaker's process of selection, connections, associations, sense of urgency, the use of first person, direct speech, and various grammatical devices are important for culling unspoken meanings about dynamics of power, subordination and resistance (Luttrell 2005). It is this selectivity that helps to highlight people's multi-positionality, the moral points they wish to make, and how speakers take up, reject, and twist dominant discourses that are independent and apart from the events reported (Riessman 1993; White 1980; Polkinghorne 1988).

James Gee has emphasized the importance of paying attention to "identity building tools" that speakers use in their narrative meaning-making (Gee 2011, p. 119). We extend this by drawing on critical race theory and de/colonizing theory, including the insights of Collins (2002), Hall and Gilroy (2017), and Williams (1991). Speakers narrate their racial identification and affiliations in complex, contextual, fluid and strategic ways. As Williams (1991, p. 250), an early proponent of critical race theory wrote: "The complexity of role identification, the politics of sexuality, the inflections of professionalized discourse-all describe and impose boundary in *our* lives, even as they confound one another in unfolding spirals of confrontation, deflection, and dream". It is within and outside of racialized boundaries that shape the way people narrate who they are and what they represent, while navigating the limitations imposed by the terms themselves.

Whiteness and "race-talk" studies also influenced our listening. Several scholars have written about how white speakers position themselves, as color-blind/color-mute, race-conscious, or race-avoidant (Frankenberg 1988; Pollock 2009), especially in conversations related to racism and its effects. Others have referred to dynamics of whiteness, white

privilege and "white fragility" first coined by Lipsitz (2006) in his classic book, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. His point is that the problem of white racism is not being white in and of itself. Rather, the problem is the historic investment in whiteness that has occurred as the result of the systems of slavery and segregation, as well as legacies of racialization at federal, state and local policies toward Native Americans, Mexicans, Asian Americans and all others groups designated by whites as "racially other," which remains unchallenged.

Fighting against racism means more than having sympathy for someone else (i.e., those who are not white) but rather dismantling the systemic investment in whiteness. White fears and fragility about maintaining a societal and personal investment in whiteness have been popularized by D'Angelo (2018) to refer to white people's range of defensive reactions (guilt, anger, fear, silence, crying, etc.) when confronting the harms of racism. "Feeling white" (or the "emotionalities of whiteness")—including shame, denial, sadness, dissonance, and discomfort are necessary to confront and overcome as a step for ensuring white accountability (Matias 2016). Meanwhile, white fragility is not only a problem for white people. It also affects "racially othered" people who must contend with the emotionalities of whiteness, which adds extra emotional labor to the experience of navigating white-dominant spaces and relationships with white people.

One striking feature of all the interviews was that in one way or another, all the interviewees positioned themselves as more "fortunate" or "privileged" than others they knew weathering the COVID-19 storm, whether related to loss, financial hardship, or limited resources (including inadequate access to technology and well-resourced schools). Even those who spoke about the death of family members and provided details of hardship couched their stories in terms of "it could have been worse". The interviewees spoke as if they were in dialogue with an overarching awareness that COVID-19 served as a window into deepening social inequalities. These interviewees made sure to acknowledge their relative privilege within a larger story of COVID-19's ravage and rupture.

6. Three Parenting Narrative Cases

We selected the following three parenting narrative cases because they exemplify inter-related themes about childhood innocence, navigating white spaces and norms, and racial accountability dynamics that resonated, albeit in different ways, across the interviews and in our Pol.is survey data.

Our interpretations are influenced by critical race and whiteness studies briefly explored above. We invite readers to enter a dialogue with the narratives, raising questions and making interpretations about how these parents are grappling with their shared goals and desires for schools to teach for and about racial justice. All interviewee names are pseudonyms.

6.1. Creating and Protecting Black Childhood Innocence: Malcolm

"It was a sobering moment for me because I realized, more so when that happened (the murder of George Floyd), that my kids are paying more attention than I even realized. I started like I was, you know, everybody was a really high emotional time and I kind of started going to like some of the protests and my family was concerned because you know that there are legal ramifications for me being on parole. I just felt like I had to go and next day after like I kind of argued with my family about it. I woke up in the morning and my younger daughter was like, 'oh, I have to show you something.' And she had like created this digital art thing on some platform. And it was a BLM centered thing and it was you know Black Lives Matter. And it was like a conversation that I hadn't even had with her. And it just kind of like reinforced to me that I was doing the right thing and then that opened the door for me to start talking to my kids and I spoke to my older child about it and she expressed how she's experienced racism before. So yeah, it was definitely an interesting time but I think it's always been. For the most part I try to understand the two I guess because maybe schools are scared of being highly politicized. But for the most part it seems that it has been business as usual. And I think that even if it wasn't

something that was brought out in the classroom there should have been some kind of individual outreach maybe done for the kids."

Malcolm was explicit in identifying the murder of George Floyd as a transformative event for himself. He opened his account setting an emotional and temporal stage to discuss his children's racial awareness. He viewed the event as new, but also part of an enduring past. The event propelled him into action, participating in BLM protests and being engaged by his kids about racism. He quickly brings the interviewer into his personal circumstances of being on parole that he discussed with ease with the African American female interviewer (we wondered whether he would have done so with a white interviewer). Whereas the event "opened the door" for him to talk with his kids about racism, he is unsure about the role of schools in addressing racism and racial violence. Even if schools do not actively teach about racism in the classroom, he believes schools are responsible for attending to individual children's feelings and well-being through "some kind of individual outreach."

Malcolm expresses surprise that his young daughter was the initiator of a discussion about racism, rather than the other way around. Contrary to the widely reported family conversation about race that Black parents hold with their children, known as "the talk" (Anderson et al. 2022), Malcolm expresses conflict, repeatedly referring to what he "hates" about the realities of Black parenting:

"I'm only conflicted by it just because it's I hate the thought of politicizing our children, but it's a reality. Like, it is a reality. Growing up and realizing that I was taught a different history. For me it was mind boggling. I was like, 'What do you mean Columbus isn't a hero?' Just thinking back on it, I kind of wish I would have been taught, you know, actual history, but just as a parent, as a protector, like I hate the idea that my children have to see all these troubles. Like I hate that they realized that BLM is a thing. I mean, younger ones, nine years old, I don't like the world that my children are growing up in, and like I hate it. And just as a parent, as a protector, I hate that I would have to explain to them like this is what it is. And just how it will create riffs within people and dynamics and things like that. But I don't think that's an excuse to not do it. I'm just yeah I'm completely torn over it. But obviously, it's the right thing. Ideally, it's the right thing."

We can hear Malcolm invoking the notion of childhood innocence and adult protection, wishing that his children could be shielded from uncomfortable truths about the past and "seeing all these troubles." Malcolm specifies "the younger ones, nine years old" and laments that the world his children are growing up in puts him in a bind. Interestingly, especially in terms of the contested national debate about teaching the history of the U.S. and its systemic racism, racial violence, and settler colonialism, Malcolm underscores his wish that he had been taught "actual history" in his youth, but as a *parent* it gives him pause. He acknowledges the limitations of his own childhood mis-education (which boggles his mind, suggesting his shift of perspective) but also worries that learning actual or truthful history can be disturbing for his children.

Malcolm's internal conflict and the way he registers his strong dislike of having to do the "right thing" expands on and complicates the survey findings in favor of teaching about BLM and white supremacy. For him, it is also a point of anguish evoking powerful feelings about wanting to insulate his Black children from the harsh realities of a racist world—to allow them childhood innocence.

At the same time, Malcolm registers surprise about his six-year-old son's political savviness:

"My son, the things you hear him say about Trump, you would think you're talking to a grown adult to formulate an opinion and he'll back it up. He will defend his stance as to why Trump is not good. He said, 'Trump is not for the people. He hates Spanish and Black people. He doesn't like us. And he's like, he's not a good president, he's not a good man.' The first time he ever expressed it to me he was six years old and it was in a visiting room in Sing Sing. And I was blown away. He's definitely not shy about expressing himself. He has no filter yet. I don't even remember how we got into that when I was just like, 'I

don't think anybody else comes up here talks politics.' But it was definitely eye opening.
Definitely cool to hear him have his own opinion and be able to articulate it."

Malcolm's narrative takes up and unsettles the canonical narrative of the unknowing, innocent child, and the all-knowing and developed adult, including assumptions about what children are capable of understanding and expressing about power, politics and racism. Malcolm seems in awe of his young son's ability to articulate and defend his opinions. His son challenges what is typically discussed during family prison visits by talking politics. Malcolm's narrative about his son seems filled with pride as well as hope.[6] Malcolm's eyes are opened, suggesting that his horizons are widened for his son's future.

Listening to Malcom's narrative complicates over simplistic notions of "childhood innocence" and what children can or should be exposed to. Childhood researchers and educators Bentley and Reppucci (2013) quote Gloria Boutte, known for her expertise on equity pedagogies, "While we are waiting for young children to be developmentally ready to consider these (*complex and race-related)* issues, they are already developing values and beliefs about them.". Most important to note is that childhood innocence has a racialized history. In a society with a legacy of enslavement and institutional racism, Black children have not been granted the same protected status as "children" as have their white counterparts. Research indicates that people of all ages see Black children as older than they are, more adultlike, and more responsible for their actions than their white peers (Goff et al. 2014). Malcolm's narrative begs the question: How can Black childhood innocence be created and protected while at the same time preparing them to thrive, survive, and actively struggle for racial justice? His narrative is also instructive for considering the unequal, racialized dynamics of whose childhood innocence gets acknowledged and protected.

6.2. Navigating White Space and Norms: Jamila

Jamila's account is given in response to the interviewer's question: "There was a question that came up in the survey that most parents agreed that their children's school should teach children to be anti-racist. Can you tell me your thoughts on this?"

Jamila's sequencing, selection, and cautious narration illustrates just how pointedly she is navigating the white space of schooling and relationships with school officials:

"I mean, it depends because it depends on, um, who's teaching the children to be anti-racist sure. Um, I think that in, um, I think that for the most part in order, if you haven't really lived in that type of, um, environment or know people, it's really hard to understand to some what can be said, it can be considered, um, discrimination. Um, and I think it's real easy for teachers and everybody else to fall into kind of just doing things that a little bit insensitive.

There was a time two years ago when the teacher mentioned something about the way my daughter's hair looked. At the time she was starting the dreading process, getting locks, um, relaxed. She had her hair, she was always changing it. So she had like a really messy bun on the top of her head. And the teacher said to her, um, 'what is that on your head?' And so she thought there was something on her head and she said, you know, she was like, 'I don't know.' And the teacher handed her a mirror to look at it. And she was like, 'Um, nothing is, you know, my hair is in the bun.' The teacher said, 'Oh, I don't, I don't think that that's really a bun. You know, what I have on my head is a bun.'

You know, so it was an interesting conversation afterward with the teacher and the principal. Um, but I don't think that she really understood how that can make somebody feel, um, you know. When you're talking about her, especially to a Black person, um, that can be pretty, you know, touchy, you know, for a young, Black person growing up, you know. We, they think about the hair a lot and, you know, try to deal with it and managing it and, you know, love it.

I think that for the most part, if you haven't really lived in that type of, um, environment or know people, it's really hard to understand some of what can be said. It can be considered,

um, discrimination. Um, and I think it's real easy for teachers and everybody else to fall into kind of just doing things that are a little bit insensitive."

Jamila conveys the centrality and significance of her daughter's hair event by using direct reported speech, establishing the behavior and characteristics of the main characters: a teacher (who we can infer is white) and her Black daughter. Jamila positions herself as part of "we/they" who "think about hair a lot." She is taking her white interviewer/listener, ever so gently, into the life experiences (including microaggressions) of Black girlhood/womanhood that are widely circulating (Gadson and Lewis 2022). Jamila considers the teacher unaware and is generous in her racial critique by taking account that if "you" (meaning White people and probably the interviewer) have not lived as a Black person in a white racist world (which Jamila calls "that type of environment") or is not familiar with Black experience, then it can be "real easy" for (white) teachers and everybody else to "fall into" (as if accidentally) saying something "insensitive" (i.e., racist). Thinking about the identity building tools that Jamila is using to tell her story, we could say that she is making an effort to build a bridge across racial differences without pointing fingers or creating discomfort for this white listener. In contemporary discourse about tackling racism, Jamila's approach is suggestive of the effects of "white fragility" that forces people of color to attend to how White people might react to issues of racism or discrimination. Jamila's style of narration conveys the extra conversational and emotional work necessary to consider the comfort of a white audience. Jamila initiates a conversation with the school officials, which she describes as "interesting"—a non-committal phrase that covers over her own reactions. She also gives the benefit of doubt to white people and avoids sounding accusatory.

Jamila's storytelling leaves out many details of what happened. How did her daughter report this incident to her mother? What were her daughter's feelings about what the teacher had said? How did Jamila respond to her daughter's feelings? Jamila does not convey her emotions about not being able to protect her child against racial harm or her innocence about a racist world. Instead, Jamila's story is told with the emotionalities of whiteness in mind with a moral instruction about the need to educate a white school staff without causing a negative or discomforting reaction. By contrast, Malcolm's story is told with a Black audience in mind; the moral point being the harmful conditions and pain associated with raising Black children in a racist society that does not acknowledge and protect their innocence and well-being.

Jamila's account can also be read as a counter-narrative about white standards of beauty, emphasizing how Black women learn how to "deal with, manage" and most importantly "*love*" their hair. Her story calls for two racial harms to be repaired. First is that teachers and schools should refuse to uphold white standards (it is the white teacher's bun that sets the standard). And second, schools and teachers must message *love* to Black children about themselves and their hair. In both cases, Jamila is concerned that the damages of whiteness and whether (white) teachers are up to the task of teaching anti-racism. She believes there is a need to be "teaching around it" and "caution" about "who we're putting into place" to ensure that the right messages are relayed. Jamila's narrative suggests some skepticism of the consensus call for schools to teach about racism and racial justice: "It depends on who's teaching."

6.3. Racial Accountability Dynamics: Eliana

Eliana tells her interviewer that she agreed to be interviewed because she is concerned about the issues. In doing so, she positions herself in multiple ways: as an educator, a mother of Black children, and the wife of a Black man who does not "trust the system as it is". She identifies herself as an insider of the school system and opens the conversation up through dialogue with her husband as if he were speaking as well:

"I'm concerned of course, as an educator, as to like academics in general, but that's more so because my children are Black and I, they're, I perceive that they are already getting a less-than education. And so my concern is just that (referring to the pandemic and

remote learning) would intensify in this environment. Not because I feel like they are missing out on learning everything they need to know in this year. Does that make sense? . . . . And my husband would say if he was here, that his concern has always been, not necessarily what the school teaches our children, because he believes that the majority of the learning (about racism) our kids will encounter will happen at home. He is a Black man and he doesn't necessarily trust the system as it is, and I am in agreement. And so the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated what was already there."

When asked to elaborate and says:

"Our resources as the city tend to go to those who already have the most resources, um, and those who need it more tend to not get it and that tends to be our Black and Brown children who make up the majority of DOE students. Without a doubt, I think that even before COVID-19 white families were, were profiting and, and, and being the recipient of more resources in the DOE and the city, I mean, it's all tied together."

Eliana talks about the COVID-19 pandemic "exacerbating" racial educational disparities already in place in New York City. She also makes a distinction between what her children are learning "academically" and what they learn about racism, which her husband believes will happen at home (and she agrees).

Eliana presents the racial impact of the pandemic as systemic (all tied together) more than individual. She uses "our children" as an identity and relationship builder, bringing her audience (and the white interviewer), into an embrace of Black and Brown children as the majority. Situating herself as an experienced teacher, Eliana makes a distinction between curriculum and pedagogy ("what you are doing with materials") and speaks directly to teachers about what "you" need to be doing.

"It's about teacher mindset. So like, as a teacher, I was a teacher for 16 years. I think it's great to have anti-racist curriculum and materials, but again, if teachers aren't believing it, if teachers aren't seeing their students for who they are, I don't know that that's enough. And I can't even believe that that's a question that we have to ponder in 2021, but apparently we do."

Eliana's critique gets stronger as she speaks about "catching herself" in an actual dialogue with (presumably white) teachers, as if bringing them directly into the room:

"Listen, I have to catch myself. Right. Like I think people become exhausted. And so it's really much easier to just say like, 'You're a racist, what you just said was racist. Like what you're doing is racist.' And move on and just say like, 'That's it, you need to fix that, whatever, I just called you that, and now you need to fix that.' I think it's way harder to consider somebody on a continuum of, of anti-racist or not anti-racist and think about what are the things you're doing to get there . . . Because when we talk about anti-racism right, that can be very individualized. Like you, are you, you know, or am I, are we, where are we on that (continuum)?"

Eliana's dialogic storytelling positions her as an expert, someone who wants to broker change. She is not explicit about her whiteness or white privilege. She acknowledges two different forms of intervention: the first is binary—you either are or are not a racist. While this approach might offer cognitive closure,[7] it suggests that anti-racist thinking is fixed, not a learning process. The second form of intervention on the continuum is harder, it is more open, more evolving where individuals can meet each other at the same or different place.

Shifting between "you"/"I"/"we," Eliana makes it hard to pinpoint her own positionality and personal experience as a white woman within the binary or along the continuum of being anti-racist. Unlike Malcolm and Jamila, Eliana shares no personal narrative of an everyday encounter she has had with a student, parent, teacher, principal, or on behalf of her own children. Instead, she addresses the issue of white fragility and emotionalities:

"I'm really tired of waiting for people to feel comfortable. I mean, we've been doing anti-bias training. This is not something new and I don't know that they've been so effective. I mean, I participated in an anti-biased training and walked away like this, this

> *wasn't good . . . I just am really tired of thinking about how white people would react in that situation. And I'm really tired of coddling and catering to white people's reactions, uh, because generations have been affected by that coddling."*

It is striking to compare and contrast Jamila's efforts to not offend or discomfort the white school officials (and perhaps her white interviewer) with Eliana's reaction, which is itself a form of privilege for Eliana to not have to worry about how she might discomfort her white colleagues. Eliana considers tending to white emotionalities (i.e., needing to be coddled and catered to) as being at the expense of generations of children.

Eliana speaks through the language of "accountability" to frame her desires for change:

> *"And so I'm hoping that what's next after this anti-racist curriculum that we really start holding educators accountable for how they see our children, because that's really at the crux of how they're teaching our children, right? Like if they saw the children in front of them, as brilliant and with endless potential and coming with strengths and their families coming with strengths, then they would teach in that way. And so something has to shift, but I'm not willing to go backwards to get it at them. . . . Like how are you teaching? How is your teaching really harmful to the Black and Brown children in front of you? Did you use all white authors for this topic? Do you affirm who your children are when you're talking to them, do you say their name correctly? Like all of these little things, right that really show beyond anti-racist curriculum, like just a CRE kind of vision,[8] cultural, responsive education vision, but like, why aren't we holding people accountable in that lens?"*

Eliana uses asset-based educational language, characterizing Black and Brown children as "brilliant" with "endless potential", coming to school with personal and family "strengths" (Pollack 2012). Asset-based (rather than deficit-based) teaching is itself a counter-narrative that Eliana tells in a storied and dialogic way, bringing (white) teachers into the room instructing them to provide affirmation, say a child's name correctly, make sure students are exposed to more than white authors, to name a few. There is urgency in Eliana's sense that "something has to shift" and a refusal to "go backwards." Left unsaid is whose responsibility it is, and begs the question of how to shift the dynamics of racial accountability.

7. Linked Narratives of Resistance

All three narratives suggest that in the white space of schooling, parents are differently positioned to demand change. There are multiple layers and intersections of concerns that parents bring to consensus and alliances. Eliana can reject the imperative of comforting white people and their feelings in a way that Jamila and Martin do not or cannot. Malcolm insists on recognizing and wanting to ensure a more protected childhood status, if not innocence, for his Black children. Jamila expects schools to do more than refuse damaging white norms and standards; she wants schools to teach her children to *love* themselves. As a school insider, Eliana is the least trusting or perhaps least hopeful that schools (particularly white teachers) can change, and yet, she has not given up.

These three parenting narratives are linked by the outlines of their resistance. They suggest the importance of racial, inter-generational, and multi-positional dialogue; how personal experiences are political and thus of public concern; and that embedded in change is a revised reflection on the past, present, and future horizons. The narratives highlight parental alarm, distress, and frustration, as well as hopes for changing the way Black children are educated.

8. Conclusions: How, Not If

Our paper demonstrates the usefulness of narrative inquiry and identifies education as a key site of resistance, focusing on the impacts of COVID-19, and racial inequalities on children's schooling. The mixed method study, with its interactive survey and in-depth interviews, afford fresh insights into parents' priorities during anxious and uncertain times.

Parents are allied about demanding change: they want more input in school decision-making and they value their children's social emotional development and mental-health, not as "add-ons" to school's mission, but as a centerpiece. Given the CRT backlash and the manufactured political conflict in the U.S. about race and education, we have identified more consensus than division among parents. There is a counter-narrative of resistance that we lift up, amplify, and complicate. We have heard parents turning to and away from schools as places they trust to equip their Black children to live in a racist society. Still, within imperfect classrooms across the U.S., parents want to protect Black children's innocence while also preparing them to survive and struggle in hostile environments. Parents want teachers (especially white teachers) to "see" their children for who they are, for their full potential, and abilities to thrive. Parents want a more comprehensive historical narrative, despite its emotional challenges. The consensus and parenting narratives highlight the layers and complexities for parents as they pursue their desires for their children in schools. Careful listening to how parents tell their stories of everyday events and challenges increase the capacity for building alliances and consensus, and potentially open up new forms of racial accountability. The task now is to create conditions that can ally children, parents, teachers, communities, schools, educational and social policies. This political imperative is an open question about *how*, not *if*.

Notes

[1] For example, a parent survey conducted by Global Strategy Group and The Education Trust–New York found that NYC parents were the most racially divided across the state. 84% of white public-school parents in NYC said their child would attend school in-person, if possible, compared to 63% of Latinx parents and only 34% of Black parents.

[2] As part of New York State's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan, equity and inclusion is an integral part of every facet of the work. The *Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Framework* created by the New York State Education Department is a guideline that is recommended at the state, district, and school-level with four pillars to create: welcoming and affirming environments; inclusive curriculum and assessment; high expectations and rigorous instruction; and ongoing professional learning and support. The NYSED CRSE Framework is referenced here: http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

[3] It should be noted that books written by authors of color are disproportionately represented on banned lists (Will 2021).

[4] A limitation of Pol.is is discerning interesting and important demographic data of the participant pool, such as gender, class, racial, ethnic, or linguistic identifers, which this survey did not explicitly include.

5   Gifted & Talented programs offer accelerated instruction to eligible elementary school students in New York City. Students apply and take an assessment to become a part of the specialized program which critics say results in social inequity.

6   We thank one of the reviewers for drawing attention to expanding the metaphor of widened horizons.

7   Again, we thank one of the reviewers for naming this distinction.

8   CRE (culturally responsive education) is a U.S. educational discourse that promotes an approach to schooling centered on students' knowledge, cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences that must three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings 1995, p. 483).

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Article

Narratives of Success and Failure in Ressentiment: Assuming Victimhood and Transmuting Frustration among Young Korean Men

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Abstract: In this article, we examine toxic masculinity, anti-feminist, anti-globalisation, and anti-military conscription positions in the narratives of what constitutes success and failure among young South Korean men during the COVID-19 pandemic. Misogynistic accounts attributed to the globalised effects of neoliberalism and its evolution through South Korean meritocratic competition, compounded by the social isolation of the pandemic, remain a puzzle psychologically, despite their toxic emotionality. We use the analytical framework of *ressentiment* to consolidate references to moral victimhood, indignation, a sense of destiny, powerlessness, and transvaluation, as components of a single emotional mechanism responsible for misogynistic accounts. In an empirical plausibility probe, we analyse qualitative surveys with young South Korean men and examine the content of the far-right social sharing site Ilbe (일베) which hosts conversations of young men about success and self-improvement. Our findings show envy, shame, and inefficacious anger transvaluated into to moral victimhood, misogynistic hatred, vindictiveness against women and feminists, and anti-globalisation stances. We discuss how the content of these narratives of success and failure in *ressentiment* relates to the electoral win of the right-wing People Power party in March 2022 which capitalised on anti-feminist grievances. We also consider the socio-political consequences of *ressentiment* narratives in the highly gendered and polarised South Korean society and expand the study of *ressentiment* outside the context of Western democracies where it has been most extensively elaborated.

Keywords: *ressentiment*; South Korea; COVID-19; misogyny; Incel; victimhood; powerlessness; anger

1. Introduction

In this article, we examine understandings of success and failure among young men in South Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we use the analytical framework of *ressentiment* to elaborate on the highly gendered and grievance-laden content of these narratives. Deepening age and gender divides became particularly relevant during the March 2022 South Korean Presidential Election as the right-wing opposition People Power party led by Yoon Seok-Yeol defeated the incumbent left-wing Democratic party led by Lee Jae-Myeong. Electoral results showed significant polarization among South Korean men and women in the 'under thirty' age group where Yoon Seok-Yeol was supported by 58.7% of men compared to 33.8% of women (Yoon 2022). Recent studies noted a culture war was fought online on young people's websites such as Womad and Ilbe, where 'trolls' 'reinforced an us-and-them rhetoric, divided along gender lines: man versus woman' (Koo 2019, p. 835). While some young people shared views on politics and society often through humour, irony, and hyperbole, similar to 4Chan or Reddit, others engaged in narratives of success and failure centred around toxic masculinity, sharing anti-feminist, anti-globalisation, and anti-military conscription positions (Um 2016; Yun 2013). Studies of

young people inhabiting exclusionary online communities also showed that women on Megalia and Womad imitated the hyperbolic, ironic, and shocking rhetoric, originally characteristic of male online communities like DC Inside and Ilbe (Jeong and Lee 2018; Kim 2021). We are interested in understanding how misogynistic performances of gender politics online and offline are expressed by young men in South Korea through narratives of success and failure.

Narratives of how people make sense of their lives 'are often stimulated or catalysed at points of crisis and tension' (McAuley and Nesbitt-Larking 2022), and our study took place during the global pandemic context which had profound implications for the daily lives of millions. Mobility restrictions placed by requirements of social isolation and quarantine posed physical, economic, and political stresses (Haleem et al. 2020). In South Korea, surveys highlighted the association between depression and continuous restrictions of daily life impacting physical activity, sleep, nutrition, and stress management (Cho et al. 2022). Studies also noted that the pandemic was linked to the proliferation of polarising narratives globally. The psychological toll of social alienation experienced by many has given rise to mental health problems such as depression and stress, domestic violence particularly against women and minorities, and online radicalisation by far-right-wing, white supremacist, and (violent) extremist movements, harnessing old and new grievances and frustrations (Ariza 2020; Fitzpatrick et al. 2020; Gunraj and Howard 2020). In this context, narratives of hostility, distrust, and stigmatisation, and deepened social divides, have been exploited by political parties and leaders for electoral gain (Kinnvall and Singh 2022). Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic on young people has been profound. Mobility restrictions impacted social interactions and extracurricular activities, compromised young people's sense of autonomy and freedom, promoted a sense of forced seclusion, and moved social life online to digital spaces, for some almost exclusively (Kelley 2020; Morton et al. 2021). During the pandemic, 'angry young men' spent more time in spaces such as gaming platforms, chat rooms, blogs, and forums of the 'manosphere' (online spaces dedicated to masculinity and men's issues, often toxic and primarily misogynistic), a practice which exacerbated their social isolation and alienation (Basu 2020; Russell and Bell 2020). It is in this context that we seek to understand how misogyny permeates narratives of success and failure among young men in South Korea. Extant studies offer two key structural factors as its explanations: globalisation and military conscription.

Several scholars argue that neoliberalism is destabilising the identity of young men (Baer 2016; Kim 2001, 2018, 2015). South Korea has rapidly developed under the shadow of American neoliberalism, becoming a hyper-competitive society, where collectivism and neoliberal capitalism combine (Kuznets 1981). The change in political ideology from traditional collectivism to neoliberalism places responsibility for success and failure solely on individuals (Mounk 2017; Sandel 2020) and influences how young people in a highly competitive society like South Korea view success, failure, and identity (Kim 2009; Ratner 1997; Smith 1996).

Gender relations in South Korea centre around discussions of racial and sexual inferiority, following from the gendered divide of military conscription (Choo 2020). Male citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 must perform compulsory military service for 18 months to 2 years, while their female counterparts are exempt. Conscription has become the main catalyst for gender conflict in South Korea, especially among young people (Choo 2020; The Economist 2021; Kwon 2000, 2021). In this context, some young men express anger against women who are perceived to have stolen masculine supremacy, originally deemed a pre-existing right (Song 2014). These structural explanations, albeit important, do not address the psychological content of these often-misogynistic narratives of success and failure and the emotional experiences attached to them.

We bring together insights from studies in political psychology, feminism, sociology, philosophy of emotions, narrative analysis, and Korean studies, to understand the affective undercurrent of what constitutes success and failure among young South Korean men. We approach anti-feminist, anti-globalisation, and anti-military conscription accounts as

interwoven narratives bundled together by *ressentiment* affect. *Ressentiment* denotes a long-lasting emotional experience which contains victimhood, envy, a deep sense of destiny, injustice, and powerlessness transmuted into other-targeting negative emotions like hatred, resentment, and vindictiveness (Salmela and Capelos 2021; Demertzis 2020; Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018). We use *ressentiment* as the analytical framework to understand expressed insecure and grievance-laden misogyny against women as well as anti-globalisation and anti-feminism narratives. *Ressentiment* has been studied in the context of grievance politics and far-right movements, predominantly in the West, focusing on the 'left behind', the economically or socially disillusioned, the white, angry, and fragile males (Brown 2019; Capelos and Demertzis 2022; Kay 2021; Kimmel 2017; Salmela and Capelos 2021), and the 'losers of globalisation' (Akkerman et al. 2013; Mishra 2017). Here, we employ it beyond the Western context, in the cultural and political environment of South Korea. Furthermore, while insecurity has often been cited as a reason why some individuals are misogynistic (Banet-Weiser 2018; Ging 2017; Levit 2020), our account approaches insecurity, as well as grievances and frustrations, as triggers of *ressentiment*, which in turn generates misogyny and other anti-social outcomes, adding analytical clarity and highlighting the rich emotional layers of this process.

1.1. Narratives of Success and Failure among Young South Korean Men

To understand the content of accounts of success and failure among young South Korean men, we take stock of the distinct social, cultural, and historical elements that shape these narratives. South Korea's youth have had a unique cultural upbringing with a fast turnaround to modernisation, impacting their self-belief in their own skills and competence. Walkerdine notes intensified privatisation, individuation, and globalisation lead to individuals feeling they must 'produce [themselves] as having the skills and qualities necessary to succeed' (Walkerdine 2003, p. 240). In a hyper-competitive market, creative, global youth have been critical to reforming the economy (Song 2003), and this meritocratic-competitive model in South Korea has been linked to collectivism, especially in education and employment (Kim 2009; Smith 1996). Extant studies suggest this model occurs under the influence of neoliberalism from the USA and has led to a change in the cultural success index for young South Koreans, defined by personal ability, responsibility, style, and consumption (Abelmann et al. 2009). Taken together, these factors of neoliberal modernisation and traditional Eastern collectivism create in South Korea a unique melting pot of individual responsibility to achieve and collective burden to succeed (Hairong 2003; Anagnost 2004; Mounk 2017).

There is a distinct difference in the way success is constructed between young South Koreans and their parents and grandparents, due to this changed political philosophy brought about by rapid modernisation and neoliberal influences. The Democratisation Generation, instrumental for the democratic transformation in the 1980s through student activism and protests, was succeeded by Generation X, the country's first post-democratisation generation. They were less active champions of democratisation and have been serving as a bridge between traditional collectivist nationalism and hierarchical organisational culture and the younger New Generation's individualism (Kang 2020; S. J. Lee 2021). The individualised sense of personhood in a hyper-capitalistic and fast-expanding market (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000) hides the structural forces that can constrain futures (Abelmann et al. 2009, pp. 232–33). South Koreans currently in their 20s and 30s are endowed with a skewed sense of meritocracy and the belief that society has fewer social ills due to the impartiality of competition, brought about by catch-up modernisation (S. J. Lee 2021). In this context, constructions of masculinity are linked to neoliberalism and modernisation considerations (Choo 2020; Kwon 2013; Kim 2001). The neoliberal model assumes that men and women are equal, and therefore there is no discrimination. Studies show, however, that changes to correct any imbalances through the redistribution of income or extending welfare create contention and feelings of victimisation among men (Choo 2020; Hubbard 2004).

Along these lines, as military conscription only affects young men, it is felt as a hindrance in achieving higher education and entering the job market and generates frustrations (Kim and Finch 2022). Compulsory military conscription is a unique aspect to life for young South Korean men, not shared by women, the experience of which contributes to the nursing of grievances about this obstacle which delays or inhibits self-actualisation (Choi and Kim 2016). As studies note, this male practice of military conscription is tied to anger, violence, masculinity, and citizenship (Agostino 1998; Choi 1997; Kwon 2000; Moon 2005). Sociological and feminist literatures on conscription examine its impact on perceptions and expressions of masculinity, focusing on how aggressive behaviour, violence and anger are instilled in young men within a patriotic and gendered setting (Choi 1997; Sherman 2007). Studies also show aggression is aimed towards women due to gendered isolation and the 'effeminate' becoming something 'other' that must be banished (Agostino 1998; Moon 2005; Theweleit 1989). This is all discussed within the context of citizenship and patriotic sacrifice (Enloe 2000; Kwon 2000; Moon 2002; Yuval-Davis 1997). Mandatory conscription in South Korea is a national service, perceived as a sacrifice. As such, aggression, banishment of femininity, and patriotism are all compounded and instilled at a foundational time of life for young men. Nearly all young men in South Korea go through this coming-of-age ritual, which carries with it grievance, frustration, and a heightened sense of victimhood.

A parallel, perhaps not unrelated source of frustration is sex. In recent years, scholars have noted an increased interest in Incel (involuntary celibate) cultures where young men become angry and resentful when denied sex by women and create communities to vent these frustrations in 'networked misogyny' (Banet-Weiser 2018). The causes for the manifestation of Incels ranges from 'scopic capitalism' and the value of sexual capital (Illouz 2019), to narcissistic regressions of white supremacy and anti-feminist backlash (Hoffman et al. 2020), and to outcomes of a Tinder-fied dating culture, where men have a lower sexual market value (Bloodworth 2020). This complex mixture of factors that lead to men feeling frustrated about the denial, perceived or actual, of sex, is at its core associated with the loss of a pre-existing sense of entitlement, not necessarily about sex. However, inferiority narratives intertwined with sex are dominant in the male-identified Incelosphere, attaching anger onto a 'misandrist' society, perceived to be the ultimate cause of humiliation and despair. Blame is apportioned to an external cause, as hatred and anger are redirected against women and feminists (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019; Kay 2021, p. 38). Feelings of victimisation follow on from the denial of a sense of entitlement (Illouz 2019), and we expect they become a frequent consideration in what is perceived as failure.

1.2. Ressentiment as the Framework of Understanding Misogyny in Accounts of Success and Failure

Anti-feminism, anti-globalisation, and anti-military conscription positions among young South Korean men are often expressed as negative affects towards women and feminists. These culturally reinforced positions could be evidenced in accounts of success and failure online and offline. To understand the deeper psychological properties of misogyny, we employ *ressentiment* as the analytical framework which can highlight how insecurities, grievances, and frustrations of inadequacy can be transmuted into other-targeting negative emotions, in this case against women and feminists, and transvaluated to a morally righteous sacrifice. *Ressentiment* is not a new term. It denotes a psychological experience introduced by Nietzsche ([1884] 1961) and studied further by Scheler (1961), and has been described as a 'cluster' of emotions (Capelos and Katsanidou 2018; Demertzis 2004, 2006, 2020; TenHouten 2018), a compensatory defence mechanism (Salmela and Capelos 2021) or a dispositional state of being (Rodax et al. 2021).

Distinct from resentment which denotes anger, *ressentiment* is triggered by repeated failures or losses that lead to frustration (Hoggett 2018; Demertzis 2020; Salmela and Capelos 2021). According to Salmela and Capelos, at its core, *ressentiment* is a double transvaluation emotional mechanism, often likened to Aesop's fable of the Fox and the Sour Grapes. Following repeated failure to acquire what is desired, the self is re-evaluated from origi-

nally being a loser, to being a pious victim, and the object that was originally coveted and highly valued is re-evaluated to be an object that is no longer sought after. *Ressentiment* distorts reality, but its distortion has a compensatory, defensive function: when an individual is unable to cope with the failure or loss, the negative feelings associated with this repeated deprivation such as impotence or inferiority are bypassed by adopting an alternative, less painful account of events. *Ressentiment* at its early stage can serve as a temporary resolution to cope with emotional pain, but it can also develop into a chronic position. At its advanced stage, the individual rejects the inferior 'old self' and its 'old values' as all-bad and adopts a self-righteous victim position, perceived as 'all-good'). The new beliefs about the self and what it values can be reinforced, cemented, and sustained through social interactions with others (Salmela and Capelos 2021, pp. 197–99).

In the South Korean context, cultural and political factors such as the rapid modernisation under the conflicting ideologies of American neoliberalism and traditional collectivism seem to contribute to young men feeling victimised by feminism, enhancing isolated masculinity through military conscription, and generating tensions around sex and relationships in a globalised society. Without seeking to examine how *ressentiment* is constructed, we employ it as an analytical framework to make sense of the emotional experiences of young men contemplating what is success and their capacity to cope with failure, loss, and frustration. We expect that if *ressentiment* is at work, we would see strong evidence of powerlessness, blended with inefficacious anger and victimhood, as well as evidence of transvaluation, pointing to an experience that becomes elevated from weak and self-reproaching, into morally righteous and other-blaming.

2. Materials and Methods

Our empirical investigation examines whether observed patterns in young men's narratives of success and failure are consistent with *ressentiment* using a plausibility probe. A plausibility probe is a stage of empirical inquiry preliminary to testing, which examines the 'plausibility' of a theory. Empirical plausibility probes adopt suggestive tests, do not require large representative samples, and establish whether a theoretical construct is worth considering, without providing exact estimates of probability (Eckstein 1992).

Our empirical plausibility probe involves two complementary data sources: a qualitative survey of young Korean men, and a thematic analysis of conversations hosted on the far-right South Korean social network website Ilbe. In the qualitative survey, we focus on how young South Korean men discuss success, aspiration, and identity. Through the analysis of Ilbe content, we examine representations of what is personally and culturally coveted in the context of online discussions about feminism.

2.1. Qualitative Survey Sampling and Design

We recruited participants for the qualitative survey from Yonsei University and Konkuk University student chats on Kakao Talk and on the social media site Reddit under the sub-reddit forum called r/Korea. Our sampling frame required South Korean men under forty. Of the nineteen respondents that completed the survey, twelve fit this profile. While this sample is not large, it allowed to explore whether *ressentiment* as an analytical framework is helpful for understanding the anti-globalisation, anti-feminism, and anti-military conscription accounts discussed in the literature. Our topic was potentially sensitive, and we opted for an open-ended qualitative survey instead of interviews, with the following considerations in mind: a self-administered questionnaire allows for higher validity in responses and more flexibility in information gathering by promoting a sense of individuality, visual anonymity, and the comfort of being able to complete the survey at one's own time and read and write in one's own native language. It also reduces the risk of participants' self-consciousness during interviews influencing responses (social desirability), and the risk of the characteristics of the interviewer (age, gender, nationality, race, interaction style, language accent, foreign appearance) influencing the outcome of interviews (interviewer bias) (Albudaiwi 2017; Rossi et al. 1983; Sicmiarycki 1979). About half of the respondents

(referred to here as R1, R2, etc.) completed the questionnaire in English and the other half in Korean. A native Korean speaker checked the translation from Korean to English (see Appendix A for the survey questionnaire).

The questionnaire contained twelve open-ended questions related to individual and group identity in the context of South Korean society and politics[1], as well as views on success, failure, achievements, challenges, and aspirations[2]. Questions were worded with a personal marker, such as 'how would *you* define fairness?', inviting respondents to highlight factors salient to them personally rather than generic understandings of fairness. We did not ask questions about the pandemic and its impacts as we did not want to prime participants to think of success and failure in a particular context. We employed thematic coding of the responses which yielded nine categories: challenges one faces, unique factors of South Korea, the politics of South Korea, relating to others, comparing oneself to others, defining fairness, defining success, defining failure, and important issues. The pandemic was mentioned by R4 in their answer on recent challenges they faced and what they have done to overcome them. This respondent answered 'COVID has been the final nail in the coffin for my CS education. Online classes have been harsh on me as an adult ADHD sufferer. I've temporarily given up my dream of being a developer and elected to grab IT job certs.' This statement shows how the pandemic impacted this individual's ability (or perceived ability) to achieve a goal. We think most respondents faced similar experiences and challenges, although they did not choose to report the pandemic as one of their identified challenges. While we cannot empirically test this hypothesis, we consider it likely given the impact the pandemic had globally, and in South Korea in particular, which imposed strict limitations on social gatherings, electronic log system requirements, business hour restrictions, and prohibitions on food consumption in public places, affecting social activities and quality of life overall (Hyun et al. 2021). Taking these factors into consideration, it is plausible that the pandemic was a significant factor contributing to the frustrations and grievances that raised young people's *ressentiment*.

The questionnaire also contained a six-item ten-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) of *ressentiment*, used in Capelos and Demertzis (2022). The scale items measured indignation, victimhood, powerlessness, transvaluation, injustice, and destiny: 'People enjoy better standard of living with less effort' (indignation); 'I feel that many people take advantage of my kindness' (victimhood); 'I feel I do not have people's respect' (powerlessness); 'Many seem important, but they should not get such attention' (transvaluation); 'Everything goes wrong in my life, why me?' (injustice); 'My hopes and dreams will never come true' (destiny).

2.2. Content Analysis of Ilbe Cases (일베)

For the content analysis, we collected data from the far-right South Korean community-led blog website Ilbe (일베) which is known for its misogynistic content (Um 2016; Yun 2013). In Ilbe, individuals share memes and funny anecdotes that reflect their views on politics and society. Ilbe is a male online space and bans female users from joining (H. Lee 2021). It is predominantly used by young South Korean men in their twenties and thirties, with 35% self-reporting being twenty-one to twenty-five years old in a 2013 poll (Pearson 2013). Our aim was to examine the messages of politically and socially marginalised users who anonymously engage in online social sharing with peers, focusing on feminism-related content. We used the prefix 'femi' ('페미') and collected the links and titles of a randomly chosen date in the year: 20 January 2022, focusing on the first 200 results. We had 156 useable posts of which we randomly selected 50 for which we extracted all text and images[3]. All content was translated back to English and coded, and cases are referred to here as C1, C2, etc. Although we did not search the platform for pandemic-related content, COVID-19 was mentioned in a few cases. C12 berates the government for not allowing an exception for the quarantine pass for pregnant women (the quarantine pass was proof of either vaccination or recent negative test, needed to use public spaces such as gyms, karaoke houses, and cinemas from December 2021 to February 2022, according to APNEWS.com

(APNews 2022)). This statement implies that pregnant women who got the vaccine would have given birth to children with deformities, and it calls for protests and an overwhelming regime change to end mask wearing and social distancing in the 'corona scam'. C19 states that the government is a 'left dictatorship' because 'judges oppose without reason quarantine pass exemptions'. C22 noted that the current politicians are populist cult leaders and an example to show this is the 'quarantine pass for students' (implying that the quarantine pass is a left-wing populist agenda and forcing it on students victimises those who are healthy). Finally, C32 stated that Korea is doomed no matter who they chose (in the March 2022 election) and that a reason not to vote for one candidate is that they are a 'vaccine defender'. Similar to the survey data, these unsolicited references to the pandemic in feminism-related content suggest that the pandemic and its social impacts was internalised by young South Korean people, and contributed to emotionally loaded, heavily politicised, gendered and conspiracy-laden narratives in the 'manosphere' (see also Wojnicka (2022) on hegemonic masculinities and the pandemic).

To code for *ressentiment*, we adapted the Capelos and Demertzis (2022) 6-item scale. For each case, we coded six discrete variables with value of 1 where there were explicit mentions or implicit accounts referring to indignation, victimhood, powerlessness, transvaluation, injustice, and destiny, and with value 0 where these concepts were explicitly or implicitly absent. We also coded for implicit content available through images, metaphor, or satire (see Appendix B for the variables coded in the content analysis, and Appendix C for coding examples of the first three cases).

To improve the stability, reproducibility, and accuracy of the coding (Krippendorff 1980, pp. 130–34), the coder was familiarised with the data, the literature, and the variable operationalisation and coded the material in a few days to avoid influences from external factors. We also took care to protect the psychological integrity of the coder. The content on the far-right site Ilbe (일베) was often hateful, misogynistic, and involved depictions of violence and sexual assault. It therefore required taking regular breaks and emotional distance from this material.

3. Results

3.1. The Content of Success and Failure: Understanding Frustrations and Aggressions

The survey contained questions about the essence of success and failure, challenges of achieving one's goals, and life in Korea. Respondents (R) made references primarily to happiness, respect, and social life, finance, occupation, and achieving their goals. Discussing financial success, R7 noted 'I want a large family and to be able to provide for it just as my parents have for my siblings and I'. R8 said 'I want to receive a real monthly salary of around two million won [approximately $1400], living in a house of a suitable size [...] and enjoy small shopping and entertainment (around $200 a month)'. Objective goals like securing a house, spouse, job, or money were also markers of success across several respondents (R1, R2, R4, R6, R8, and R12).

Discussions of success raised anxieties about meritocracy. The question on unique factors of South Korea contained mentions of achievement: '[Korean's] tend to be competitive' (R1), 'overly obsessed with growth' (R3), 'sustained belief in capitalist mobility' (R4), 'desire for achievement' (R6). Hyper-competitiveness and a constant strive for upward mobility means there is always a constant goal ahead, and there is always something to be desired.

While neoliberalism masks structural inequalities (Y. Lee 2021), the belief of attainment that is characteristic of the South Korean meritocratic-competitive model exacerbates this masking even further. Believing an ambition or aspiration is achievable through self-improvement means that when it is denied, there will be far greater feelings of impotence and failure. This is because the unattainability of a goal that is viewed as attainable through self-improvement could be seen as a failure of the self through a lack of said improvement. By disguising social inequalities that may hinder achievement, there is an increased likelihood of misidentifying injustices, as there is no clearly identifiable object onto which to

re-attach feelings of failure. Therefore, the neoliberal meritocratic-competitive model that drives South Korean youth could lead to more opportunity for failure, increased negative emotions when success is denied, and no identifiable object for those emotions to be directed towards.

The definitions of success and attainment among South Korean youth have evolved since previous studies (Abelmann et al. 2009) and are characterised by individual responsibility and material gain through constant upward movement. We expected that the combination of these neoliberal influences in this hyper-competitive society would generate conditions that trigger *ressentiment*.

3.2. Frustrations of Military Conscription

The survey mentioned military conscription only once, and this was in relation to recent challenges. R1 stated that 'due to mandatory military service in Korea, there was a risk of academic interruption'. They solved this problem by using an alternative system of service personnel by passing an exam, so instead of serving in the military they served in the police. This shows that military service, at least by some, is seen as a challenge to overcome, particularly in relation to academic attainment.

In the content analysis of Ilbe, military service was frequently mentioned as a barrier towards individual goals, redirecting frustrations towards women and feminism. Conscription was the main topic in four different cases (8%) and mentioned in nine (18%). Highlighting the link between feminism/feminists and military service, military conscription was discussed as a valiant hardship that must be endured, while women, feminists, and politicians make soldiers suffer. Case 4 references a conversational YouTube channel made by a Korean man who serves in the military and describes his service: 'I almost think that I am the lowest class in society [...] I wake up every day at minus 20 degrees, 40 degrees below a sensible temperature and I freeze up and work for several hours at my post [...] No matter how much service time, I still write a letter. If the social atmosphere had the least respect.' This case is referencing letters sent from students at an all-girls high school (Jinmyung school in Mokdong) to men completing military service. The school gave young female students the assignment to write supportive letters thanking conscripts for their service, but some students produced letters that were derogatory. In response, online anti-feminists advocated violence and sexual assault against the students[4].

An important question here is how frustrations about military conscription relate to success and failure. Conscription of course is not a failure as such but could relate to failure for these young men who experienced the mandatory service (from which women are exempted) as an obstacle to their success, defined in educational and material terms. This experienced injustice elicited a sense of victimhood, and as we would expect in *ressentiment*, the negative self-focused emotions about actual or anticipated failure in competition were redirected onto others. While we cannot definitively say why conscription (which involves state-forced isolation in a violent and male-dominated space) was not mentioned frequently in the qualitative survey but was featured frequently in Ilbe, we can provide a tentative explanation: online environments like Ilbe facilitate sharing narratives of victimhood (in this case about conscription) and redirect negative affects onto others. A likely explanation is that the strictures of the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the sense of victimhood about conscription among these young South Korean men, similarly to how the pandemic and its strictures contributed to emotionally loaded, heavily politicised, gendered and conspiracy-laden narratives in the 'manosphere', as we have observed above.

3.3. Narratives about Sex

The survey and Ilbe data link comparisons to others to sex, and through sex, to race and nationality. Rarely is sex mentioned in the context of 'romantic and sexual fulfilment' (Survey, R4). The Ible data reference sex as sexual capital, with frequent mentions of sexual appeal and attractiveness. In the 50 sampled cases which included the prefix 'femi', about 32% (16) referred to sex, rape, or sexual appeal. In this subset of cases, when discussing sex,

the emphasis on race and nationality was 8% higher than the sample overall (see Table A3, Appendix D). Men often expressed feeling victimised by women as they are 'so cheap to men in your country. Fucking bitches who acted like I'm nothing' (C14). The nationality aspect of identifying as South Korean men being treated poorly by women, combined with 'being overlooked as a sexual partner' through racial inferiority (C18), implies that this feeling of victimhood is not related to individual identities, but links to collective identities of being Asian and South Korean males. In this subset of cases focusing on sex, sexual appeal, or rape, blame was more heavily attributed to women compared to the sample overall, while feminists were equally blamed.

3.4. Recognising Ressentiment

Looking more closely at the content of frustrations expressed by young South Korean men in the Ilbe data, we identified references to powerlessness ('if the social atmosphere had the least respect', C4), morally charged victimhood (referring to the gruelling conditions of service that is demeaning), injustice ('I almost think I am the lowest class in society', C4), and destiny for sacrifice, particularly in reference to military service.

In the survey, the most frequent elements of *ressentiment* were indignation (other people enjoy a better standard of living with less effort), injustice (everything in life goes wrong, why me?) and destiny (my hopes and dreams will never come true). *Ressentiment* was evident also in the open-ended responses of participants. For example, when asked about the roles of others in society, R4 said it was to 'uphold a crumbing, exploitative structure that will leave their precious pensions in the dust' and R8 said 'the poor donate money to the rich and compete with each other to see who has contributed the most, and the rich play the role of multiplying their wealth with wealth'. These examples point to an individual sense of morally enhanced victimhood, where those who contribute to society are blind to the exploitation of the elite class, and they are the only ones who can see the injustice. These examples also contain a hint of superiority, which aligns with conceptualisations of *ressentiment* described in the literature.

In the Ilbe data, of the six markers of *ressentiment*, we counted on average 1.74 markers per case. In about a third of the cases (30%), we identified three or more markers of *ressentiment*, and 12% contained four or more markers. The most frequently occurring markers of *ressentiment* were powerlessness in 74% of cases, and victimhood in 32% of cases. This aligns with theoretical expectations of the significant role of these two markers for *ressentiment* (Salmela and Capelos 2021).

We also examined whether the negative feelings resulting from the perceived injustice or victimhood were projected against a particular target. In three survey respondents (R4, R17, R27), the focus for injustice/victimhood was the Mokdong/Jinmyung all-girls high school incident. Three respondents (R24, R29, R46) referred to a general lack of respect and ridicule from women, two respondents (R22, R23) referred to the salary of 2 million won a month for a conscript, and one respondent (R50) referred to military service as communism. Five respondents (50%) named feminists/feminism or women as they re-attached blame for their negative affects (R17, R24, R27, R29, R50), and five (50%) named a political individual or party (R4, R22, R23, R46, R50). R50 listed both. While we do not see a uniform source for the negative affects caused by military conscription or the treatment of soldiers, the vilification of women, feminists, and the political elite is clear. For young South Korean men who feel victimised by military service, there seem to be two routes for blame: feminists or politicians. The former connotes a militarised gender divide, and the latter indicates a neo-liberal mindset—both linked to feelings of victimhood.

Coding for the political orientation of the sources of victimhood and discontent, we noted that they span from the far-right to the far-left (Table A4, Appendix D), linking victimhood to discontent expressed towards the entirety of the system, rather than a particular ideology. It appears that the young South Korean men in our study, living within a neoliberal model which still retains tensions from the remnants of collectivist ideology,

expressed victimisation, noting the barriers they themselves face, but not mentioning the barriers that others face.

In the subset of cases related to sex, there were more mentions of *ressentiment* (9% increase, Table A3, Appendix D) compared no non-sex related cases, through references to denied entitlement and feelings of racial inferiority. Feelings of impotence were projected onto women, creating a sense of victimhood. C18 describes women as shallow for being 'no longer satisfied with their relationships with men of other races' once having sex with a Black man due the size of their penis. Here we see an example of feeling victimised by women due to a perceived notion that women devalue men based on race and penis size. Women, more so than feminists, are the outgroup and source of blame, suggesting it is the fault of all women for these men's feelings of victimhood.

Another aspect of *ressentiment* is the devaluation of what is coveted to being unwanted and unworthy of attention. The analysis of Ilbe material highlights how women being sexually attractive or being used as sexual objects was approached as a pre-existing entitlement for these young men. Five cases explicitly state that feminists are not sexually arousing or attractive. Some are simply devaluing feminists as not being attractive: 'Femoid features. Not sexually arousing' (C13); 'Ugly women deserve feminism' (C15); 'Before and after dying with Femi. So damn ugly' (C31). C43 expresses sadness and anger that a K-Pop girl group is not scantily clad as they have 'succumbed to their [feminists] power' by putting on suits. The narrative throughout is one of disappointment or disapproval that women are not attractive to these men.

4. Discussion

Our analysis of narratives of success and failure among the young men that answered our survey showed that success in South Korea is frequently associated with financial gains. Abelmann et al. (2009) describe the intersection of collectivism and neoliberalism as creating young South Koreans who 'aspire so eagerly to an individualised project of human development' (p. 243). The last decade has seen an evolution in the aspirations of young South Koreans, where some still hold an individualised goal that helps the collective, while others have a personal goal that is defined by consumption and material gain. Our findings fit this observation.

Contemplating success among participants of our survey also brought about anxieties. Extant studies identify the product of a constant need for a larger goal as another effect of neoliberalism in the meritocratic-competitive model. Neoliberal influences from the USA have changed the success index towards personal responsibility (Abelmann et al. 2009). The weight of personal responsibility combined with the collectivist basis for the meritocratic-competitive model that South Korea currently works under (Kim 2009) creates a burden of success that is individualised and never satisfied. Our data also point to this direction, and we think this is a finding that warrants further investigation. It would be valuable to examine whether the collectivist basis of the South Korean meritocratic-competitive individualist model aggravates or alleviates this individualism, and how young men express collectivism in their personal and political lives.

Turning to the Ilbe material, discussion of frustrations frequently involved militarised masculinity. The hardships of military service in Ilbe discussions were transvaluated to a morally enhanced sacrifice, consistent with *ressentiment*. Through neoliberalist personal responsibility, under a meritocratic system demanding constant self-improvement, these young South Korean men appear to have felt victimised by the conscription system. Consistent with Agostino (1998), their masculinity appeared to be shaped through 'physical discipline where male bodies are viewed [...] as superior to female bodies' (p. 58), and through that superiority, men go through a 'metamorphosis into soldiers [that] involves their separation from 'effeminate civilians'' (Moon 2005, p. 72). In the South Korean context, conscription on Ilbe was mentioned as a key component to constructing male identities through the isolation of the masculine. At the same time, conscription instilled aggres-

sion and banished femininity, marking women and by extension feminism as an identifiable re-attachment for feelings of inferiority, injustice, and victimisation.

The banishment of the female form and effeminate character in an isolated gendered setting on the Ilbe forum creates women as both 'other' and 'inferior', making them an easily identifiable external object when re-attaching feelings of impotence or inferiority. The product of this was aggression towards feminists and women not only in the Ilbe data, but also in the backlash to the Mokdong/Jinmyung girls school incident, where some young men advocated for violence and sexual assault against the young women who wrote derogatory letters to conscripts (see Appendix C). We see again evidence that militarised masculinity breeds aggression in a gendered setting (Choi 1997), making women and feminists the most identifiable 'other' to direct negative feelings towards.

In addition to women, frustrations were directed towards the political elite. When discussing discontent for conscription among young men in South Korea, Moon describes a generation that is 'individualistic and unwilling to sacrifice' (Moon 2005, p. 70). This is considered a product of the hyper-competitive meritocratic model within a neoliberal society that South Korea has evolved into, where young South Koreans are unable to accept enforced collectivism at the hindrance of their self-development (Choi and Kim 2016; Kim and Finch 2022). In our data, too, young South Korean men on Ilbe used military conscription references to express feeling disadvantaged compared to women, pointing to increased feelings of victimhood. By not being able to see the barriers that marginalised groups face in South Korea, these young men, from a position of privilege, appeared to have seen only their group as the victims of the conscription system, and some placed the blame on the political elite.

Victimhood was often expressed on Ilbe in conversations about sex. The literature on feelings of victimhood among men due to sexual impotence, whether discussing a change in sexual capital or market value (Illouz 2019; Bloodworth 2020) or narcissistic regressions of white supremacy (Hoffman et al. 2020), are rooted in a perceived pre-existing entitlement being eroded or taken away (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019). Like Ilbe, other Incel networks are 'dedicated not only to the accumulating of more erotic capital for men, but also recouping that capital that has been lost' (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019, p. 5008). By sharing and discussing explicit content, these networks confirm a male entitlement of women presenting attractively to them, while highlighting that feminists are denying this entitlement—leading to feelings of victimhood.

Bloodworth (2020) and Illouz (2019) note that negative emotions originate from men perceiving themselves as having lower sexual capital or market value. We found evidence of this dynamic in the Ilbe data: young South Korean men perceived themselves as having a lower sexual market value, devalued themselves, felt inferior, and ultimately projected negative affects to women–enemies, retaining for themselves a righteous victimhood. As such, the Incel culture in South Korea is not just about gender, but appears to contain considerations of race and nationality, expressed as sexual impotence and inferiority. These complexities of sexual capital and market value appear in our data to have led young men to feeling victimised through the denial of desire for physical intimacy or sexual appeal. The women-enemies were presented (and probably perceived) as denying these young men their assumed original entitlement of having women as sexual objects.

For our empirical plausibility probe, we relied on a small number of survey participants and the content analysis of sampled material from far-right Incel blog Ilbe. While our analysis provides useful insights about the psychological undercurrent of the expressed frustrations and grievances of young South Korean men and offers the quantitative and qualitative measures as a useful toolkit for capturing *ressentiment,* they are by no means indicative of population trends or generalizable to all young men in South Korea. Further data collection of large and representative survey samples and expansion of the coding analysis to more cases and a wider timeframe can allow more confident generalisation of the findings.

We can reflect, however, on the key findings: in the grip of *ressentiment*, the young men discussing their frustrations in Ilbe changed the value of military service from a hardship into a morally righteous sacrifice. As such, the narratives of success and failure we examined were weak in agency or desire to propose a counter-narrative of resistance to military conscription. The powerlessness and passivity of *ressentiment* can be interrogated further with interviews which would allow delving deeper in the contents of their narratives, and examine whether these narratives are self-recognised, thus internalised as individual or collective identities. Our findings about conscription also warrant further investigation. Grievances about conscription were mentioned frequently on Ilbe but not in the qualitative survey. We think the online Ilbe environment facilitated sharing narratives of victimhood about conscription and redirected negative affects onto 'enemy' others. We also think the strictures of the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the expressed sense of victimhood about military conscription, contributing to emotionally loaded, heavily politicised, gendered and conspiracy-laden narratives. The effects of the pandemic have been studied in relation to mental health and depression, and studies can further explore their link with grievances and frustrations against other groups in society.

While our analysis was limited to survey and Ilbe data, our coding framework can be applied to films, songs, fiction, and comics. It would be interesting to examine in parallel the dominant political narratives of the party and leaders in power in South Korea, either via documents or interviews, and assess whether they are alleviating, reinforcing, or capitalising on these grievances for the next electoral contest. Many far-right organisations operate in similar online ecosystems to Incel groups; with this in mind, our analysis can expand to such networks and study their accounts of success and failure during the pandemic, identifying affective and cognitive 'meeting points' with the Ilbe users.

5. Conclusions

In this article, we examined anti-feminist, anti-women, anti-globalisation, and anti-military conscription accounts among a small number of survey responses of young South Korean men and users of Ilbe, applying the theoretical framework of *ressentiment* to identify patterns in our data. Powerlessness, victimhood, and indignation were evident in accounts of individuals striving for self-improvement and material gain, discussions of military conscription, and sex. Putting these findings in context, extant studies note that in South Korea neoliberalism stimulates a hyper-competitive meritocracy. We found these conditions intensify *ressentiment* affects. Scholars document a shift in the last decade among youth, where success and aspiration focus on personal and material gain, rather than personal attainment for a collective goal (Abelmann et al. 2009). Entrenched meritocratic ideals mean upwards mobility is seen as attainable if one only works hard enough. This personal responsibility of self-development comes hand in hand with a lack of contentment. There will always be a measurable or ambiguous goal ahead, meaning that there is always something to be denied, sparking envy, shame, and inefficacious anger. When coupled with the inability to recognise societal inequalities beyond oneself, these 'incomplete successes' trigger individual perceptions of injustice and failure. When there is no clear scapegoat to be blamed for negative affects, feelings of individual and collective moral victimhood gain ground. This misidentified victimhood mentality among the sample of young South Korean men we examined is sustained through an online network of misogyny—ultimately making it increasingly difficult to diffuse.

The research we undertook generated material on identity, agency, and subjectivity. We looked at the young men we studied and their position in South Korean society dialectically, examining how their socio-political environment determined their experiences and how they, in turn, responded to this environment. We sought to identify whether the experiences of the few young men we surveyed were linked to wider narratives of *ressentiment*, recognising that they do not 'speak on behalf of' all young South Korean men, and that their reflections were made at a specific point in time in their lives and are therefore partial and subject to change. We are also conscious of the importance of meaning, inter-

pretation, and power in our research, and the value of exercising reflexivity. We recognise geographical variations in masculinity and femininity, the social construction of gender, success, and failure. As we conducted this research, we took care to allow the voices of young men (through their statements) to tell their story, rather than us interpreting their words. Having their written responses allowed us to go back and check to make sure we have not imposed meaning over their words. Gender affected the way we conducted our research (opting for surveys to allow for anonymity and less intrusion), and we took care how we worded the questions in our questionnaire to be respectful and unintrusive. Recognising that language is power, we invited our participants to complete the questionnaire in the language they preferred (Korean or English), and we checked translations with a native Korean speaker to avoid misinterpretations of culturally loaded terms. Finally, we reflected on the insider/outsider dynamic in our study, and we took care to read widely on South Korea's cultural, social, economic, cultural, and political context to deepen our understanding. Central to our research has been the ethical obligation to not (re)produce prejudicial representations and instead allow deeper and fairer appreciation of the phenomena we studied.

This research invites us to think about the social and cultural specificities that can generate narratives of success and failure in *ressentiment.* The personal responsibility of success founded on consumption ability ('enjoy small shopping and entertainment') was the marker for success among those individuals *in ressentiment*, whereas the personal responsibility to provide for others in a non-consumer-centric sense was more prominent among those with lower *ressentiment*. Understanding anti-narratives, stories of success and failure, frustrations, and grievances is as much a psychological as it is a cultural and a political affair. Here, we looked at their intersection, focusing on the psychology of what is coveted, desired, wished, and denied, by studying individuals' accounts of success and failure in a context of neoliberalism and heightened meritocracy. What we found is that *ressentiment*, like other psychological processes, is also socially constructed and shared and rooted in other social artefacts (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Our study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we found traces of its social impacts in how young South Korean people internalised feminism-related content and produced emotionally loaded and gendered narratives.

As 'narrative and imagination are integrally tied to one another' (Andrews 2014, p. 1), our findings generate new questions shared with other contributions: what type of polity do the holders of *ressentiment* accounts of success and failure imagine (see McAuley and Nesbitt-Larking 2022), and how do their ideals relate to the political offerings by parties and their leaders who seek to harness support in contemporary political competitions? For example, gendered nationalist narratives involve notions of the ideal woman as a mother and a nurturer of the motherland/nation (see Kinnvall and Singh 2022). Such dominant narratives promoting manhood and strength do not align with the powerlessness of the *ressentiment* narratives we identified here, which discredit womanhood while victimising men. We can then ask further, if what is politically on offer accentuates *ressentiment* among young men, would they be able to engage in dialogue with other narratives, and could their growing disaffections impart political impact that is socially responsible (see Phoenix 2022)? For example, could the contentious issue of mandatory conscription become the focus of public debate or lead to the development of counter-narratives that can resist the status quo, instead of transvaluated frustration internalised as morally enhanced sacrifice?

Because *ressentiment* is property of the powerless and the marginalised, and since marginalisation and exclusion breed radicalisation (Pretus et al. 2018; Kisić Merino et al. 2020), the prospects of *ressentiment* yielding pro-social outcomes are slim. A different emotional mechanism would be essential for socially responsible scenarios to take effect. We noted the intensification of misogynistic appeals in online communities like Ilbe where young South Korean men feel they are not alone. While these platforms often serve as digital echo chambers, reinforcing grievances, promoting radicalisation, and inciting violence, they also offer an opportunity to vent frustrations. If venting transforms into shar-

ing among like-minded peers, these narratives could become descending voices with the power to mobilise political action. Even among the most impoverished, hope for change is possible, when its passion is shared in a like-minded collective, as research on social movements astutely demonstrates (Salmela and von Scheve 2018).

We paraphrase Bradbury (2020) as we recognise that personal, social, psychological, and political experiences, imaginations, and their narratives are intertwined and constantly in flux. This is a valuable insight for scholars and policy practitioners because it deters deterministic accounts containing demonisation, stigmatisation, and dehumanisation, which can harden the victimhood mentality of groups and result in further exclusion. Our analysis shows that investing in the systematic study of *ressentiment*, identified in narratives and embedded in cultural and political contexts, can shed light on the possibilities for change and resistance in realities that often seem pre-destined for destructive outcomes.

Appendix A. Questionnaire and Survey Questions

Research into South Korean Society

Thank you so much for agreeing to be surveyed as part of this research project. Please try to write answers in English but you may respond in Korean if that is more comfortable. All of your responses are strictly confidential, and your name will not be linked to any of the research materials. You will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from this research. With all of this in mind, do you agree to continue?

이 연구 프로젝트의 설문조사에 응해주셔서 감사합니다. 답변은 영어로 작성해 주시고, 한국어가 더 편한 경우에는 한국어로 답변해 주시기 바랍니다. 귀하의 모든 응답은 엄격히 비밀이 보장되며 귀하의 개인정보는 어떠한 연구 자료에도 연결되지 않습니다. 이 연구의 보고서나 파생되는 보고서에서 귀하를 식별할 수 없습니다. 이 모든 것을 염두에 두고 계속하는 데 동의하십니까?

- Yes, I agree—동의합니다
- No, I do not agree—동의하지 않습니다

Age

나이

- 18–20
- 21–24
- 25–30
- 31–35
- 36–40
- 41+
- Prefer not to say—말하지 않는 것을 선호

Gender
성별

- Male—남자
- Female—여자
- Prefer not to say—말하지 않는 것을 선호
- Other—다른

The next section is a little tricky, the questions are vague and open-ended. Before you start, take a second to think about yourself, who you are, who you want to be and how society is around you. Try not to think too hard about these questions and go with your gut instinct when you read them, they are not trying to trick you!
다음 섹션은 약간 까다롭고 질문이 모호하고 개방형입니다. 시작하기 전에 잠시 시간을 내어 자신, 자신, 되고 싶은 사람, 사회가 주변 환경에 대해 생각해 보십시오. 이 질문에 대해 너무 어렵게 생각하지 말고 읽을 때 직감대로 가십시오. 질문은 당신을 속이려는 것이 아닙니다!

Please tell me a little about yourself.
간단히 자기소개를 해주세요.

What are some of the things you would say are unique to South Korea?
한국만의 특징이라고 한다면 어떤 것이 있습니까?

What is your role in society?
사회에서 당신의 역할은 무엇입니까?
What are the roles of others in society?
사회에서 다른 사람들의 역할은 무엇입니까?

What is politics like in South Korea?
한국의 정치는 어떤가요?

What are the issues most important to you?
당신이 관심 있어하는 사회적인 문제/ 이슈는 무엇입니까?

What are your aspirations? Do they feel achievable?
당신의 포부는 무엇입니까? 달성 가능하다고 느끼는가?

How would you compare yourself against others you know?
자신을 타인과 비교할때 어떤 가치를 기준으로 비교합니까?

How would you define success?
성공을 어떻게 정의하시겠습니까?

How would you define failure?
실패를 어떻게 정의하시겠습니까?

How would you define fairness?
공정성을 어떻게 정의하시겠습니까?

What have been some of your recent challenges and what steps have you taken to overcome them?
최근의 어려움은 무엇이고 그것을 극복하기 위해 어떤 조치를 취했습니까?

This section will give statements to which you can rate how much you agree with the statement on a scale from 1 to 10. 1 = do not agree at all and 10 = fully agree.
이 섹션은 귀하가 진술에 동의하는 정도를 1 에서 10 까지의 척도로 평가할 수 있는 진술을 제공합니다. 1 = 전혀 동의하지 않음 및 10 = 전적으로 동의합니다.

Other people enjoy a better standard of living with less effort.
다른 사람들은 적은 노력으로 더 나은 생활 수준을 누립니다.

I feel that many people take advantage of my kindness.
많은 사람들이 나의 친절함을 이용하는 것 같아.

I feel I do not have people's respect.
나는 사람들의 존경을 받지 못한다고 느낀다.

Many seem important but they should not get such attention.
많은 사람들이 중요해 보이지만 그러한 관심을 받아서는 안 됩니다.

Everything goes wrong in my life, why me?
내 인생에서 모든 것이 잘못됩니다. 왜 나올까요?

My hopes and dreams will never come true.
내 희망과 꿈은 절대 이루어지지 않을거야.

Thank you for your responses. Do you agree to be contacted to discuss more about South Korean society?
응답해주셔서 감사합니다. 한국 사회에 대해 더 많이 논의하기 위해 연락하는 데 동의하십니까?

- Yes—네
- No—아니요
- Maybe—아마도

Appendix B. Content Analysis Coding Variables

1. Case No.—Case number
2. Ingroup mentioned—Is there an in-group mentioned/inferred?
3. Outgroup mentioned—Is there an outgroup mentioned/inferred?
4. Nostalgic thinking—Are there traces of nostalgic thinking (If yes, copy text)
5. Desire for change—Is there a desire for change? (If yes, copy text)
6. Change Forwards—Is there a desire for change forwards/in the future? (If yes, copy text)
7. Change Backward—Is there a desire for change backwards/towards the past? (If yes, copy text)
8. Abrupt change—Is there a desire for abrupt change? (If yes, copy text)
9. Anti-positions—Are there any anti-positions? (If yes, copy text)
10. Hope—Are there traces of hope? (If yes, copy text)
11. Efficacy—Are there traces of efficacy? (If yes, copy text)
12. Indignation—Are there traces of indignation? (If yes, copy text)
13. Transvaluation—Are there traces of transvaluation? (If yes, copy text)
14. Victimhood—Are there traces of victimhood? (If yes, copy text)
15. Powerlessness—Are there traces of powerlessness? (If yes, copy text)
16. Injustice—Are there traces of injustice? (If yes, copy text)
17. Destiny—Are there traces of destiny (If yes, copy text)
18. Violent/Illegal Action—Is there reference to violent or illegal actions? (If yes, copy text)
19. OwnGroupBest—Is one's own group described as the best? (If yes, copy text)
20. GroupUnderappreciated—Is one's own group described as underappreciated? (If yes, copy text)
21. Topic markers—What are the topics/themes discussed?
22. Total—The total presence of all markers
23. Total *ressentiment* markers—The total of the core *ressentiment* markers (coding variables 12–17)

Appendix C. Content Analysis Coding Examples

Table A1. Extracts.

Case No.	Image	Translation	Text	Translation
1		N/A	옆에 붙어 있던 게 문재앙이었음	Moon Jae-ang was next to me
			역사적으로 의미도 없는 여자 사진 한장	A historically meaningless picture of a woman
			세종대왕보다 위대한 5만원 신사임당	Shin Saimdang of 50,000 won greater than King Sejong the Great
2	N/A	N/A	예전에 이런 일화가 많잖아? 아들, 딸이 같이 있는 집안은 거의 아들만 공부 시키고 딸이 무슨 공부냐? 이러면서 학교도 못 나온 딸들 많았는데 지금 돌아가는 거 보면 오히려 이게 ㄹㅇ 혜안이였음.	Have you had a lot of stories like this in the past? In a family with a son and a daughter, almost only the son studies, and what kind of study does the daughter do? There were a lot of daughters who couldn't even go to school while doing this, but looking back now, this was a real insight.
			여자가 학력이 올라갈수록 결혼, 출산율은 반대로 운지함. 그리고 학력높은 여자일수록 ㅅㅂ 꼴페미 확률이 오히려 올라감.	Marriage and fertility rates reversed as a woman's education level increased. And the higher the educational level, the higher the probability of being a [disgusting] radical feminist.
			남자 명문대 여자지잡	Men's Universities, Women's Ji-job [non-prestigious university graduate]
			남자 지잡 여자 고졸	Male Ji-Job [non-prestigious university graduate], Female High School Graduate
			남자 고졸 여자 중졸	Male high school graduate, Female middle school graduate
			이런 식으로 남자는 본인보다 한단계 아니 두단계 낮은 년도 마음먹고 외모 괜찮으면 결혼하는 남자들 꽤 되는데 보지년들은 절대 아님.	In this way, there are quite a few men who get married if they think they're one or two steps lower than themselves, and if they look good, they're definitely not pussy bitches.

Table A1. *Cont.*

Case No.	Image	Translation	Text	Translation
2	N/A	N/A	니들 여자 대졸 남자 고졸 커플 본적있냐?	Have you ever seen a female college graduate male high school graduate couple?
			출산률 올리려면 옛 어르신들 선견지명 대로 여자는 초등학교까지만 배우게 하고 학교 못 다니게 해야된다. 여자가 더하기 빼기만 할 줄 알면되지 뭘 더 배우려고 하노?	In order to raise the fertility rate, as the old elders had foreseen, women should only learn up to elementary school and be barred from attending school. A woman only needs to know how to add and subtract. What more are you trying to learn?
3		N/A	자본주의 맛보고 살 뒤지게 쪄서 인생 나락가니	Life goes downhill after tasting capitalism and gaining too much weight
			페미니즘 외치며 국민들 경제력 이것저것 뺏어가려고 개지랄떠네 ㅋㅋ	They shout feminism and try to steal the people's economic power.

Table A2. Coding examples of 3 cases.

Coding Variable	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Ingroup mentioned	0	Men	The public/people
Outgroup mentioned	0	Women	Capitalists/feminists
Nostalgic thinking	A historically meaningless picture of a woman Shin Saimdang of 50,000 won greater than King Sejong the Great	In order to raise the fertility rate, as the old elders had foreseen, women should only learn up to elementary school and be barred from attending school	0
Desire for change	0	In order to raise the fertility rate, as the old elders had foreseen, women should only learn up to elementary school and be barred from attending school	0
Change forwards	0	0	0
Change backwards	0	In order to raise the fertility rate, as the old elders had foreseen, women should only learn up to elementary school and be barred from attending school	0

Table A2. *Cont.*

Coding Variable	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Abrupt change	0	0	0
Anti-positions	0	Anti-feminist	Anti-capitalist, anti-feminist
Hope	0	0	0
Efficacy	0	0	0
Envy/Jealousy	A historically meaningless picture of a woman Shin Saimdang of 50,000 won greater than King Sejong the Great	There are quite a few men who get married if they think they're one or two steps lower than themselves, and if they look good, they're definitely not pussy bitches.	0
Transvaluation	A historically meaningless picture of a woman	0	0
Victimisation	0	0	They shout feminism and try to steal the people's economic power.
Powerlessness	0	0	Life goes downhill
Injustice	0	0	Steal the people's economic power
Destiny/Action	0	As the old elders had foreseen	0
Violent/Illegal	0	0	0
OwnGroupBest	0	0	0
OwnGroupUnderappreciated	Shin Saimdang of 50,000 won greater than King Sejong the Great	0	0
Topic markers	Economy, Chosun (Sejong)	Education, marriage	Capitalism, economy
Total	5	8	7
Total *ressentiment* markers (12–17)	2	2	3

Appendix D. Tables

Table A3. Content Analysis 'Sex' data.

		Cases Referring to Sex, Sexual Appeal, or Rape (32%)	Sample Overall
Reference to race or nationality		50%	42%
Blame or outgroup mentioned	Feminists	69%	70%
	Women	25%	14%
	Feminists and women combined	94%	82%
Indicators of *ressentiment* present (average)		38%	29%

Table A4. Sources of Victimhood and Discontent in Conscription Cases.

Case No.	Perceived Injustice	Reattachment Defence, What/Who Is to Blame?
4	'I almost think that I am the lowest class in society [. . .] I wake up every day at minus 20 degrees, 40 degrees below a sensible temperature and I freeze up and work for several hours at my post [. . .] No matter how much service time, I still write a letter. If the social atmosphere had the least respect'	'It was Moon Jae-in who gave dog food to soldiers quarantined due to Corona Moon Jae-in is a bastard'
17	'The incident of condolence letters at Jinmyung Girls' High School'	'The feminists' banners hahahaha. . . What a mess. . . '
22	'Although Seok-Yeol Yoon is level 1 (economic and security right wing, liberal democratic centre-right, socioculturally centre-left), his opponent is so populist that he himself often shows "populist tendencies pushed back". (Soldier salary 2M [2 million won, approx. £1260])'	'his opponent [Lee Jay-Myeong—Democratic Party] is so populist that he himself often shows "populist tendencies pushed back".'
23	'2 million won for a soldier. [2 million won monthly military salary, approx. £1260]'	'Ahn Cheol-soo, this asshole'
24	'Women mocking soldiers and blaming the men for their hardships (ex. the men made the army~)'	'women'
27	'Mokdong Academy' [condolence letters incident]	'Femmy, who still hasn't cured her mental illness'
29	'Why women have no choice but to demean the military. . . Feminists, above all else, demean, ridicule, and caricature men's military duty. There is a need to nullify the sacrifices and hard work of the soldiers.'	'Feminists [. . .] women'
46	'Soldiers won't be subjected to poor meals or ridicule. [If adopted as the 51st state of the USA] They spend a day working hard on the white horses they like and they can buy and eat in Pakchon with the dollars they receive.'	'If you look at it [South Korea] now, both the Democratic Party and the National Power Party seem to have no answer'
50	'Conscription itself is communism.'	'The Feminist movement [. . . and] the government is the enemy of the people'

Notes

[1] Respondents were asked: 'Please tell me a little about yourself'; 'What is your role in society'; 'What are the roles of others in society'; 'What are some of the things you would say are unique to South Korea'; 'What is politics like in South Korea'.

[2] 'How would you define success'; 'How would you define failure'; 'How would you define fairness'; 'What are the issues most important to you'; 'What are your aspirations? Do they feel achievable'; 'What have been some of your recent challenges and what steps have you taken to overcome them'; 'How would you compare yourself to others you know'.

[3] Some posts were deleted from the site before the content could be viewed. It is possible that these posts included important data that could change the results and should be taken into consideration.

[4] Not a verified source but comprehensive information on the incident and backlash can be found here: https://www.koreaboo.com/news/girls-high-school-feminists-male-extremists-soldiers-letters/ (accessed on 2 January 2023).

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Article

Constructing Home through Unhome: Narratives of Resistance by an Iranian Asylum Seeker in Germany

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Abstract: The recent COVID-19 pandemic uncovered some already existing but somewhat hidden inequalities in different countries. Many features of inequalities that pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic for a long time were uncovered due to this radical shift in living arrangements globally. This paper focuses on one particular feature of these inequalities: housing situation of one Iranian asylum seeker in a heim (refugee accommodation) in Germany. Contributing to an understanding of how political resistance can be exercised through personal biographies, the paper differentiates between the notion of 'unhome' from home by discussing three factors: choice, anchor and the significant of others. The paper contributes to the growing scholarships around home in migration and its intersection with personal narratives.

Keywords: home; migration; housing; inequality; belonging; resistance

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic there were various arguments about the notion of home. One of the important messages about 'staying at home' aiming to control the spread of the virus was globally widespread. Most countries that were hit by the virus used different translations of this phrase which also generated popular hashtags in the social media. In some countries those who stayed at home were hailed as heroes and those who left their homes were fined, publicly shamed or at the very least, were reprimanded. The message simply invited all to stay at a place called home, a place that is supposedly safe and free from outside threats. This message presumed that the public space was unsafe by the spread of the virus but more importantly the domestic space was a safe haven. It is the latter assumption that is at the heart of this paper. Is the private space of home (any home) always safer than the outside? What are the boundaries of home? And is home experienced by all in a similar way? This is particularly important in the case of those who live in 'unconventional' living arrangements such as student accommodations, public housing for asylum seekers, or shelters for the homeless.

This underlying meaning of 'home' in relation to structural inequalities is not new and my interest in the notion of home among migrants dates back well before the pandemic. However, within the pandemic lockdowns and through multiple conversations I have had with some of my research participants who were mainly asylum seekers and refugees from different backgrounds in Ireland, the UK and Germany, I came to know that home is not experienced in the same way when the rules of the public space is supposedly equal for everyone.

This paper is based on the life story of one Iranian asylum seeker. Touraj, (his real name following his own request) who has been living in a *heim* (an accommodation system in Germany designed for asylum seekers and refugees) for about three and half years describes his various homes. He compares the practices that he has had to engage in to reveal the stark difference between the realities of home and imaginations of home (Boccagni 2017). It is through these comparisons between reality of home and the idea

of home, that this paper focuses on how political resistance emerges from personal and private stories and manifests in the imageries of a future life. For this purpose, I will unpack the notion of unhome as an antithesis of home. But through doing this, I will discuss how living in an unhome is seen as an act of resistance towards the structural inequalities that are experienced by asylum seekers transnationally.

This paper first discusses the notion of home in relation to belonging and recognition in recent and growing literature on home. In order to understand 'unhome' it is vital to understand how these three concepts (home, belonging and recognition) are related. It will move on to present the importance of choice as an anchor and the significance of 'others' in such relationship. Finally, the paper contains a discussion section about how living in an unhome is an act of resistance that ties the stark present in-limbo situation to a hope for a better future. In other words, the paper's contribution is that through resisting—in time and space—against exiting housing (and other) inequalities, Touraj constructs a narrative of active participation and inclusion within the German society. Hence, he links home and belonging to a future life that is not yet achieved but is potentially more sedentary which could feel more secure (good for conclusion nor here).

2. What Is Home?

Home, is a central concept in sociology and geography and has attracted much attention in recent years (Ahmed et al. 2003; Boccagni 2014, 2017; Duyvendak 2011; Kochan 2016; Ralph and Staeheli 2011; Walsh 2011). Home can be understood in a wider sense than a house or dwelling (Mallett 2004) because it does not refer to the physicality of a home (such as an apartment, a house or structure of a dwelling). Home can be conceptualised as a site of belonging and familiarity as Sarah Ahmed (1999) argues. Whilst home is mainly counted as a place of comfort, control and privacy which can evoke positive emotions, it can—at the same time—represent a place where negative and ambiguous feelings are developed and experienced (Brickell 2012b). In fact, the wealth of research in feminist studies (that focus on domestic violence), for years have been pointing out this dark aspect of home and have tried to expose the unequal power relations that usually cause so much pain for victims (mostly women) of domestic violence (Blunt and Varley 2004). In this literature, home, is argued to be a place of danger and threat rather than stability, comfort and control. It is against this backdrop that one needs to think of a place which has the capacity to be/become home and unhome at the same time. Notwithstanding, the quest for home with its spatial, physical and emotional aspects reminds us that home is never a finished project (Fathi and Ní Laoire 2021). The ongoing process of seeking, making and rebuilding home, or what Boccagni (2017) calls 'homing' is about everyday practices of cultivating home rather than achieving a stage or end of a process (Boccagni and Brighenti 2017). This process of homing, a notion that was earlier used in a similar sense by Avtar Brah (1996) or homemaking (Boccagni 2017), is tightly linked to the sense of belonging.

3. Home, Belonging and Recognition

Reducing migration to physical movements and journeys masks a variety of experiences by migrants who aim to have a place that is called home. Treating migration as a mechanical movement, deprives migrants of agency from the process of displacement and emplacement. Sara Ahmed argues that, for many, home can become a 'site of practised belonging' (Ahmed 1999). Vanessa May (2017) proposes that home can be a space of unbelongingness. Both statements confirm the strong relationship between the notion of home and belonging. Much of the sense of belongingness or unbelongingness that is experienced in relation to home is in fact relational and multi-scalar (Brickell 2012a, 2012b). Because home is understood through scales: micro (family, personal relationships and domestic space); meso (community and neighbourhoods) and macro factors (being part of a nation or living in a country). Migrants' identifications with multiple homes at these scales in fact represent a desire to secure a place of being and belonging at various levels (Tolia-Kelly 2004) and whilst the majority of migrants want that sense of inclusion at meso and macro

levels, it is always the first scale, the immediate surrounding of one, that is part of the everyday experience of a migrant. Hence, the structure of living place, becomes extremely important in narratives of home and how its arrangements evoke the sense of belonging.

On the other hand, homeland becomes emblematic in how migrants understand belonging (Antonsich 2010). However, country of origin is not the sole point of identification and the feelings of belonging whilst it informs practices and feelings after migration to a great degree (Flynn 2007). Home also encompasses 'sensory world of everyday experience' (Ahmed 1999, p. 341; see also Accarigi 2017) and these senses that are embedded within the tacit knowledge migrants obtain after migration are always made in relation to past lives and homes.

These diverse attributes of home highlight two important complexities in relation to home and belonging. The first is that home in migration in essence is a contradictory term. Whilst home is related to the notion of settlement and growing roots in a particular place, migration refers to movement, uprooting and departures (Ahmed et al. 2003). Conceptualising home-in-migration through focusing on practices and the processes of home-making (homing), has tended to overcome this contradiction (Brah 1996; Boccagni 2017). I have highlighted the urgency of examining this contradiction between home and migration concepts in a recent publication given the mass number of people on the move and the international policies that call for 'managed migration' (citation deleted for peer review). Home and migration as such raise important questions about belonging. Where is home? How is it experienced? When does a place such as a city, a country or a structure of a dwelling begin or cease to be a home? The answer to these questions is not easy but can usefully direct us towards some paths to understand the relationship between home and belonging.

Secondly, although migrants may be regarded as 'successful' in creating a *physical* home such as building a place, renting a house, furnishing a space, moving furniture and other meaningful materials across borders, there are spatial, temporal and embodied belongings that need to be considered in relation to these physical aspects of home (Yuval-Davis 2006). This complexity of home refers to belonging that is achieved through interaction with others and receiving a sense of recognition from them (Fathi 2017; Valentine 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006). In other words, when individuals move onwards and particularly when become displaced through routes of migration and asylum systems, the foundations of what constitutes home for them changes. They lose the recognition they used to get (at the very least as citizens of a country). The 'sense of recognition', a lengthy process, is a much-rooted concept that is at the heart of home and belonging (Fathi 2015). The sense of recognition also needs official approval (in the form of a refugee status, visa, or citizenship), or what Yuval-Davis calls 'the politics of belonging' (2006). This official recognition facilitates the stay in a country although the feeling is always accompanied with feelings of uncertainty (Fathi 2017). Recognition is at the heart of interpersonal relationships and it is practised in the public spaces, structures and institutions within a society. As Nancy Fraser (1997, p. 280) put it 'misrecognition is an institutionalized social relation, not a psychological state'. In other words, misrecognition is never a one-sided feeling that migrants experience but it is embedded within the social relations of members in a society that systematically facilitates some people feel belonging or not. It is usually the misrecognition (both official and relational) that directs us to the importance of unhome.

4. What Is Unhome?

Unhome, as a concept has recently gained attention in human geography and critical geographies of home (Brickell 2012a; Nethercote 2022). It refers to the process or the situation that actively and systematically deprives people of making a home (Brickell 2012a; Nethercote 2022). As discussed above, home and belonging are related and intertwined. There is a third element important in the notion of unhome and that is power. Blunt and Dowling (2006) in their seminal book, *Home*, propose the concept of 'critical geographies of home' that interrogate the link between home, power and identity. They argue that critical

geographies of home shift attention away from the concept of home as a place of living that is devoid of any power structures and directs our attention to power relations that make a place 'homely' or 'unhomely'. Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that contradictory emotional narratives about home (both in terms of materiality and concept) refer to a vital aspect of experiences of home that needs contextualisation: the role of power in these interrelations. Brickell (2012a) connects emotional engagements driven from materialities to home and argues how as researchers we can 'do' critical geographies of home. She concludes that focusing on unequal power positions in the domestic space is key to 'doing' critical geographies of home. She particularly encourages us to think critically about the experiences of those who live in 'the margins of home' (p. 227) at different scales of home: domestic, private, global and local. Experiences of unhome, or those at the margins of home, are not positive or warm. These spaces lack authority, control and are often racialised (Nethercote 2022). Indeed, acknowledging negative emotions associated with power and home when intersected with racial inequalities are encapsulated within some recent discussions about capitalism, racism and home (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Nethercote 2022). Nethercote (2022), in particular, argues that forceful denial of home that targets specific groups in society leads to 'racial capitalism' (Jenkins and Leroy 2021). To sum up so far, home and belonging are tightly related, but when located within power relations that govern living conditions within the structures of a place, together they contribute to the notion of unhome. This is particularly true in the case of asylum seekers' housing condition.

5. Methodology

This paper follows a constructionist approach to narrative analysis (Esin et al. 2013). The method is focused on small stories narrated within a large life history of an individual and focuses on the dialogue that takes place between the researcher and the participant. As during the pandemic, there was no opportunity to travel nor to conduct face-to-face research, I explored using internet as a medidum of research. Touraj was introduced through a common friend, and after an initial conversation on the phone, we agreed to have long conversations to discuss the notion of home, homeland, migration and belonging. Each interview took about one to two hours and in total there were four of such interviews. The interviews were recorded, and parts of them were transcribed by myself. In the follow up interviews, further questions and new topics were being developed. In this context, Touraj was indeed a co-researcher, actively leading the debate, and later on co-authored a paper with myself and participated at a conference where the same paper was presented (both in 2021).

6. *Heims*: Unhomes in Action

Heim in German means home but in this context *Heim*(s) are referred to accommodations that are provided by the German federal state for asylum seekers. Touraj, an Iranian asylum seeker in his late 40s lives in one of these heims in Berlin. He has a brother in Germany and a sister and a mother who live in Tehran. All family members are political activists and at different times, they have been arrested and imprisoned in Iran several times. Touraj himself left Iran about 10 years ago (2012), first fled to Turkey, and then paid a human trafficker to go to Greece. He lived in Greece for seven years and applied for asylum in Greece first. His application was rejected several times before he moved onwards to Germany. Whilst in Greece, Touraj was engaged in some activities for asylum seekers' rights as he described the 'awful housing conditions in Athens'. Upon arriving in Germany in 2019, just before a series of pandemic lockdowns, he was housed in a heim, little did he know that the structures of the heim was the only image of Germany he could see for a couple of years.

According to Touraj, heims are usually temporary accommodations and are made available to asylum seekers whilst their applications for refugee status is being processed, a period that can last up several years. Rooms within a *heim* are shared among 2–3 individuals and kitchens and bathrooms by people who live on the same floor, sometimes up to 15–

20. Each building is composed of 4–5 floors and each floor has up to 10 rooms. *Heims* in general are cold and unwelcoming spaces. These characteristics became accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar characteristics of cold, unhomely and empty spaces are devoid of physical and emotional contacts. Similar imagery is reported about Direct Provision centres in Ireland–structures which are used to host asylum seekers for a temporary period but lack adequate standard of housing (Breen 2008).

He described how people were locked in rooms and were only allowed to leave the room for the sporadic uses of bathrooms in the lockdowns. A guard responsible for several rooms, would sit in the corridor and allocate particular slots for the use of bathrooms. This rule alone caused much anxiety and distress among the residents living with Touraj in this heim and the anxiety soon led to hostility amongst the residents and between residents and the guards. Touraj became vocal about the injustices that he witnessed during the lockdowns in this (and other heims) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Touraj was unlucky as within a few months of arriving in Germany, COVID-19 hit and everywhere went into lock down. The isolation and his lack of interaction with others made him reflect on the notion of *unhome* and encouraged him to engage in this collaborative work. We had one initial conversation followed by three long interviews online throughout the last year about the notion of home. In the second interview, sharing the above photo (Only those who have a home can stay at home), he told me that many refugees and asylum seekers who live in heims in Germany feel they are locked not only in the rooms but in an 'accommodation system' that does not facilitate their integration and have turned the home into a prison.

Touraj's idea of home and unhome comes down to three factors: choice, anchor and the presence or absence of the significant others. In the following sections, I discuss these points.

6.1. Choice

Quite often, migrants engage with transnational activities that show their allegiances to places where they live or places of past homes. In any case, the power of choice in the activities that they engage reinforce their home-making practices with such as sending

remittances and building houses in home countries (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; Van Hear 2004; Sandu 2013). Other examples would be organising family reunions despite costs and challenges (Ramirez et al. 2007); or through transnational caring for older generations who stayed put (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019). As Boccagni and Nieto (2021) argue most critiques of home do not engage with the underlying questions that refer to a space. Choice as the main function of making a home must be present otherwise a place with most potential in making a sense of belonging can become a place of unhome.

Touraj refers to the notion of choice a lot in his interviews. He started his last interview by a Persian expression:

> Touraj: We have an expression in Farsi which says: 'chahar divari, ekhtiari'. It means within the four walls of your home, you can do whatever you want. I believe that ideally the four walls need to protect you from the outside, from the danger.

Touraj is describing here the foundation of what a home entails. It is a place that is separated from the rest of the world and is excluded by what is counted as the 'outside' or the public. But he subtly refers to what is important within these four walls, and that is the control and the power to chose or exercise autonomy. This in Farsi is called 'ekhtiar'. Home according to Paolo Boccagni (2017) is mostly a place where one feels safe and secure. We see how Touraj's idealisation of home here is about feelings of being safe from the outside world. Porteous's (1976) early distinction between a home and non-home shows what makes a difference between the two concepts is the extent to which one can control the space (inside versus outside). The place is also associated with having control over the settings and being in the company of familiar people with whom home-making practices become meaningful (Walsh 2011). Porteous's distinction draws a boundary between the enclosed versus the open space, where being enclosed brings one closer to safety and control. However, we know through the wealth of research in home in migration that due to quick changes in migrants' lives, the notion of home and the safety driven from that is not long lasting. As Boccagni (2017) argues, 'life events such as international migration shows how fictious that expected permanency [of a home] is in practice' (pp. 72–73). Because although on one hand a migrant needs a sense of permanency that is implied within the notion of home, their movements deconstruct the notion of home and challenges home as a safe, stable and permanent place. This volatile and in process characteristic of home, migrants often speak of an anchor, that implies a fixed memory of a home.

The first issue about choice that migrants in a *heim* deal with is the accommodation itself. Most asylum seekers in Germany must stay in heims during the time they are waiting for the outcome of their refugee application. They are not prevented from renting a place outside a heim and leave the accommodation system. However, there are several obstacles in living outside a heim which forces most migrants staying in heim. The first problem is that there are high rents in the private sector, which most asylum seekers cannot afford (residents a heim pay rent, although considerably lower than the market average). Landlords normally request tenants to provide them with job contracts that last more than six months in order to make sure that tenant can afford the rent. But based on Touraj's observation and experience, no employer offers a contract which is more than six months. The reason for short contracts is for firms not to commit to keep individuals in case their asylum application is rejected. Finally, if someone gives up their accommodation in a heim, it is very bureaucratic to acquire the accommodation again, usually combined with lots of paperwork in German language, if the resident plans to return to live in a heim (which may not be necessarily the same building, risking losing touch with some newfriends). As a result, the person might be risking becoming homeless.

Such a limbo and temporary situation can last for years, but at the very least, it takes away a chance of living outside the heim if the migrant choses to do so. Choice here becomes a luxury for displaced people as Kabachnik et al. (2010) argue.

The second issue with choice in heims experience is about not having autonomy about with whom one likes to share the space. Touraj argues that: 'the dream about a home that I have is to have *the* key to the place not *a* key, but the key'. He contemplates about the issue that he does not have the choice about who to share the room with whilst he knows that there is no corner of private life that he can enjoy. Because, according to him, even if he could chose who to share the room with, living with another stranger in the room was exposing.

The right to have a private space in many countries are taken away from asylum seekers. The living arrangements very soon turn into hostile environments and migrants have to live in conditions that make their stay unpleasant at the very least. This 'permanent impermanence' (Brun 2012) that asylum seekers have to deal with over the years, creates what Touraj describes as a 'place of survival' rather than a place of living.

He argues that although the heim where they live has the basic components of a home (it is a shelter, it is warm in winter months, there is a toilet, shower and a kitchen), it is the politics around a heim that makes the place an unhome. O'Reilly (2020), in a research with asylum seekers in Direct Provision or DP (similar asylum accommodation in Ireland) observes a similar situation. She argues that lack of choice and control over basic everyday practices, such as cooking, alienates the residents from the structure of the DP dwelling. O'Reilly (2020, pp. 137–38) argues that the policies that structure Direct Provision have located it, and the people who reside in it for varying lengths of time, in an 'in-between space', between inclusion and exclusion, between hospitality and hostility, between citizenship and non-citizenship and between place and non-place'.

Whilst it is important to understand the perspectives of heim in Germany, it becomes clear that similar policies about housing of asylum seekers and refugees are enforced across Europe and beyond. Such policies need to be read within a wider European approach to asylum housing and home provision as O'Reilly (2020) rightly argues. As such in this section, what can be concluded is that choice is often taken away from migrants as part of a concerted effort towards creating structural inequality that impacts migrants' sense of self-worth and belonging. The removal of choice encourages one to look for an anchor, or what people together although they may be physically apart.

6.2. Anchor

It is inevitable to discuss an anchor in relation to past homes. As fleeting as they could be, memories of past homes can work towards giving a feeling of embeddedness to a person who lives in a current state of limbo. Touraj, explains how in Iran, through eventually buying a flat as a family, they managed to end an ongoing and constant series of removals between different rental homes. The apartment that was bought in Karaj (a small city near Tehran) becomes a safe nest for the family and a *langar* or anchor for him. Comparing home to an anchor is important for Touraj as the space of home for him, with both parents alive (his father passed away recently), was in stark contrast to the unsafe public space of Iran, as a political activist.

> Touraj: We were tenants for years and we were changing homes very frequently. We managed to buy this place eventually. It is a very ordinary flat, in a block of flats. It is 90 square meters. It has a living room, it has a large kitchen, a toilet and bathroom and two bedrooms. It doesn't even have a balcony. But somehow the memories from previous home have evaporated from my brain and the only memories I have [of a home] is from this flat.

Touraj explains that because this flat was purchased as opposed to others that were all rented, the family members could make changes to the structure of the house.

Touraj: this was the first time my parents owned somewhere. I even did some construction work for this house. I don't think the sense of a home is about a neighbourhood. No, but it is the last place [I lived in when I was in Iran]. That is why I remember this place so vividly.

Anchor, here, encapsulates the memories of the past. Past home as anchor, is one with a fixed image for Touraj, one that keeps coming back within the fleeting images of current unhomes:

Touraj: Our country is our home. For me home is both my country and a home where I lived, the 'paternal home' or khaneye pedari. I have a place, a room in migration that is mine but when I think about it [home] carefully, the paternal home comes to my mind, although it is only my mum who is left in that house. It is as if it is my last strong of home I can grab in my life. That place, is the only memory that has stayed with me from a real home. I think if that place is lost, I won't know anywhere else as home. Last week, my sister told me they are thinking of selling that place... It really hit me although I did not live in that house for a long time. Maybe one or two years. Then, I left Iran and dad died. It was the last place I lived with the rest of my family in Iran, it was the last place I saw dad alive... and the memories of the house has stayed with me.

When he was asked what constitutes a home for him, he defined a home in relation to the sense of security and belonging that comes with a variety of warm feelings such as safety, belonging and inclusion (Boccagni 2017), even though that Touraj refers here to the public space of home country rather than an enclosed space unlike his description of home in Germany that is mostly about the physical space of the private home.

Touraj: what constitutes home is not out there. What makes a place home, is whether or not that place pleases us or not. We migrated because in our country, we gradually lost the things that make Iran a home.

He then argues that having the choice to live in a place, the way one desires to is key component of a home. Although having the choice to make a home, for a migrant, poses an important contradiction. I have argued about this contradiction between home and migration above. Because the essence of making a home is about permanency that comes with a sense of security and staying put whilst migration refers to uprooting and movements. When uprooting is enforced (such as forced displacement), it leads to long-term and protracted dislocation of a social positioning. Here, choice becomes important. The transition from a home that is reminiscent of the past to an ideal one that is aspired and is directed towards the future passes through present homes that are lived at the moment.

Touraj: I do not have an image of my home in Germany. I do not even think about a home in Germany. But wherever that home is, I want it to have a toilet for my own, one that I exclusively use. Other characteristics are not important for me. I want a small corner (room) where I can set my own rules.

What lies behind an anchor, is power and control of elements of home, that are missing from the current housing situation. Touraj talks about his home in Germany in terms of power and control. He says these are 'taken for granted components of a home'. A toilet, a quiet corner, having the liberty to come and go at any time one desires as bare minimums of a place to call home, are necessities that have become absent luxuries, but work towards a longer term attachment in the same way that 'significant others' can make one.

6.3. The Significant Others

Heims are unhomes in practice also because they are excluded from the society. Such accommodations are placed in locations outside cities and towns, that geographically

places the residents further away from the fabric of the society. Refugee camps set up in Greece and detention centres in the UK are also other examples of geographically distanced locations chosen for accommodating asylum seekers. This physical distance makes it even harder for people outside the *heim* to access the buildings. Touraj describes how his brother who has lived longer that Touraj in Germany finds it difficult to visit him at the heim where Touraj lives. The relationship we make to a place we call home develops in multiple directions but as Somerville (1997) and Allen (2008) argue, it mostly revolves around the co-presence with significant others.

During the pandemic, three people within Touraj's *heim* were tested positive with COVID-19 virus. All residents were subsequently quarantined inside their rooms for 14 days, whilst Touraj and some other men were transported to another *heim* to be quarantined for 14 days separated from the residents in their residence heim. He equated the experiences of being quarantined in the second *heim* as being in a solitary sell within a prison. He said: 'I have experiences of being imprisoned in Iran, this one [being quarantined inside another *heim*] was much worse'. This is because the physical distance he experienced between himself and the world he barely got to know (the first heim) became even greater in the absence of ways of communication not knowing the language and not having access to the same social network which existed in the first heim. His only interactions during this time were with a security guard who was sitting at a distance and would shout at anyone trying to leave their room. The sense of loneliness and exclusion is evident in his account. One of the fundamental aspects of the relationship a person makes to a space is the history one makes through these temporal connections (Lawrence 1985, p. 130). Touraj got used to the first heim as he got to know residents but being forcefully evicted from there, he argues that the unhome in practice is constantly and continually made and remade by systematic exclusion.

'Residential histories' (the time a person spends in a place) here are intertwined with biographical histories. It is the significant others and their biographies that are making a place, even an unhome, significant to us. When this connection between the person and history is cut, the process of displacement evokes a variety of negative feelings as a response to the physical and emotional exclusion one experiences. Although the first *heim* was already an unhome, being sent to a different one created a rupture to residential biography that Touraj and others like him. The loss of significant others are the opposite feelings of inclusion in a grouping or affinity towards a transnational space (Ehrkamp 2005). So in the process of making a space as unhome for a group (usually through forceful removal of a home or denial of a home), the sense of belonging and misrecognition is evoked. This is at the heart of my discussion about Touraj's attempts at making a home in an unhome setting.

Earlier in the interview he had described the place. It was an ordinary flat with two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. He mentioned that there is not even a balcony, to emphasise the ordinariness of the place. But as we see from the above extract, what made this place significant and important in his recounting of home, is the family members that lived there.

Touraj: 'Sometimes these conditions [to call a place home] are all financial but many times, the structure of a home is emotional. It is the need to be loved and to love someone'.

Touraj here vividly refers to the importance of significant others in the composition of a space as home. He lives alone in a room, and for that, he counts himself lucky that he does not need to share the room with someone. The following photo shows his room which he tried to make homely by growing plants and adding some small touches.

But he said when it comes down to it, this place cannot be called home, as there is not a person whose relationship can give meaning to the practices within the room. When I asked him whether he counts his place as his home, he answered:

Touraj: So to answer your question whether I count this place home, I need to say that I have this room and I have a key, but it is not the only key. Someone else has the key to this room and it means that it is not entirely mine. Ownership of this space is an issue for me. I pay rent here, but I share the key with someone else and for me this is a half home. It is not complete although it has the factors I mentioned above.

What is ultimately characteristic of Touraj's narrative is that vacillation back and forth to past homes (Iran, Turkey and Greece and Germany). What is striking is that from these places he was forced to move onwards due to arrests and rejections in asylum applications but this fact did not leave him to have positive feelings about these places, indicating how significant others can play a role in one's attachment to a place of residence. We see that narratives of home and unhome in this case, are not purely related to post migration. Home is an elusive concept that does not know boundaries and can take a form of memory, reality of present and aspiration of future.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, I tried to show the importance of the domestic space of home, inequalities and the sense of belonging and how they shape discourses of political resistance. The politics around the control and maintenance, allocation and provision of housing for asylum seekers is accompanied with lack of control and agency. Accommodation provision for asylum seekers in Germany (like other European contexts) create an in-between space between permanence and impermanence not fulfilling the needed autonomy one needs from the domestic space of a home. As such, these public accommodations that are shaped and developed based on 'practicality' of accommodating refugees show features of unhomes.

What differentiates a home from an unhome lies in a variety of structural and personal factors. Structural inequalities have a persisting impact on personal lives in relation to their

feelings of inclusion and belonging, personal attachments to spaces (domestic, public, local and global). On the other hand, personal factors are more fluid and based on memory and feelings. The three factors discussed in this paper, were the importance of choice, anchor and significance of others that differentiate between home and unhome. At the same time, it is the personal biographies combined with residential histories that help create connections to a place.

Unhome, as an analytical concept, a place that one is forced to stay (lack of choice) and one that is devoid of any emotional relationships to people or spaces (anchors) and is usually physically empty and excluded (absence of significant others), helps us to understand the experiences of displacement and homemaking better. Because of these charactristics, unhome attributes to resistance. We saw above how Touraj's sense of belonging that emanates from his connections to his multiple homes, encourages him to become vocal and active in different countries that he lived. Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) argues that it is when the routine everyday aspect of life is disrupted, the sense of belonging is evoked. This is true about much of the personal acts as well as public movements. An effective trigger can be displacement of a place, house, city or a country that evokes one's feelings of belonging and inclusion.

Whilst unhome is a negative concept that usually is placed opposite home, it still has characteristics that are useful in analysing personal biographies of migrants such as resistance towards spatial inequalities in terms of housing, employment, travel and movement across borders. The circumstance around the notion of unhome are also tied to the personal and sensorial elements such as how migrants feel towards a particular place.

Through Touraj's life story, I discussed how the process of an unhome is done through forceful eviction or displacement of an individual. Movements across borders and in one occasion from one shelter to another, three factors of choice, anchor and significant others were discussed as important in making a home.

The first point discussed here is choice. Whilst choice is counted as a luxury in migrants' lives by Touraj and as it appears in Kabachnik et al.'s (2010) work, it is yet a present component of narratives of home. In Touraj's case, choice was present in the past homes and narratives of home in Iran, whilst its absence in his home in Germany, gave him a juxtaposition to highlight its importance. In a recent paper, the importance of choice was highlighted by Boccagni and Nieto (2021). They argued that the absence of choice is leaving their participants (young migrants from outside EU living in European countries) to refuse calling their place of residence as home. Touraj similarly uses the word home to refer to an imaginary place in future where he can live on his own, where he exclusively has the 'key' or where he can enjoy having a private toilet. By this, he points out that choice is intersected with ownership of a place and the exclusivity of that place to a close circle of known people.

The second point discussed by Touraj was anchor. I argued that anchor in past homes allows migrants to find some form of permanency in imageries of home. These imageries are used to protect oneself from the volatile present conditions and the unknown of the future life.

The last point discussed by Touraj referred to the importance of significant others. Living in refugee camps that lie at the margins of larger cities in Germany and being struck by multiple lockdowns during the pandemic, Touraj refers to the importance of significant others in transforming an unhome to a place that could temporarily called home. Here we see how the interrelationships between people occupying a place and the spaces are shaping home. A home is only actualised when one can control that space by choosing the have and let certain groups of people enter. Although the control is not his key focus, he believes that by controlling the space, he can benefit from the presence of others as a relational quality of a home that is at the heart of reinforcing residential histories of a place.

To conclude this paper aimed to contribute to understanding how the notion of resistance is practised through living in an unhome. As is evident from this life story, resistance against structural inequalities is always combined with individual agency and is

achieved through small acts of everyday life. The contribution hence lies in the argument that it is through personal biographies—in time and space—that we can learn about resistance against exiting housing (and other) inequalities. Persosnal biographies are particularly important for those who are living on the margins of society, those who experience unhome for example. Touraj constructs a narrative of active participation and inclusion by taking us to memories of past homes and his aspiration for a future home. By doing this, he relates spatial and temporal elements of home to his own personal life and shows that how personal is political and how narrative can be turned into an act of political resistance.

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Article

Learning to Resist and Resisting Learning

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Abstract: The COVID crisis has disrupted routine patterns and practices across all spheres of everyday life, rupturing social relations and destabilising our capacity for building coherent selves and communities by recollecting the past and imagining potential futures. Education is a key domain in which these hopes for the future have been dashed for many young people and in which commitments to critical scholarship and pedagogies are being contested. In a world of stark socioeconomic inequality, racism, and other forms of dehumanising othering, the pandemic serves not to disrupt narratives of meritocracy and progress but to expose them as the myths they have always been. This paper will explore forms of political resistance and the (im)possibilities for experimental pedagogies in response to the broken promises and unrealised dreams of (higher) education in the context of the COVID crisis. Reflecting on my own everyday life as a scholar and educator in a South African university, and in dialogue with students' narratives of experience, I will examine the ways in which the experience of the pandemic has released and mobilised new forms of resistance to historical institutional and pedagogical practices. However, these hopeful threads of alternative narratives are fragile, improvised in the weighty conditions of a status quo resistant to change, and in which the alienation and inequality of the terrain are being exacerbated and deepened through a proliferation of bureaucratic and technicist solutions.

Keywords: narrative; hope; pandemic; higher education; South Africa; inequality; political protest; imagination

1. Introduction: The Rupture of the Pandemic

For every generation of children learning to read, write and do arithmetic, for every generation of students of physics, philosophy, or psychology, education is a domain of possibility oriented towards the future. These are Vygotsky's (1978) "zones of proximal development", zones of potential yet to be realized. The trajectories of education are typically framed as a process of growing up and into existing adult roles and culturally patterned practices of knowledge-making and work, through the progressive accumulation of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). These currents of the "narrative unconscious" (Freeman 2010) that join us to collective cultural history, enable creative development (or "progress") but simultaneously carry traumatic historical effects into the present. However, as much as activities in classrooms, in families, and in the world of work are mediated by the past, the horizon of imagined futures provides the other fluctuating reference point for present action and thought. Psychosocial life, particularly the intersubjective processes of learning, oscillates back-and-forth in ways that make both past and future coalesce (or possibly collide) in the present. This capacity to "time-travel" (Andrews 2014) is constructed across the temporal and spatial distances opened-up by language and extended in text, and all teaching-learning entails these psychic journeys across time and space. Our present subjectivity is thus motile and mutable, infused simultaneously with memory and imagination. The articulation of the past and the future renders education ambivalently potentially oppressive and liberating. In the context of higher education in South Africa, these antithetical impulses are starkly racialised and intertwined with historical inequalities perpetuated in the present. Traversing this contested terrain, therefore, requires resilience,

perseverance, and resistance enacted in multiple forms, in overt political action directed at systemic change, and in the micropolitics of interpersonal interaction in learning-teaching. This article is primarily focused on the everyday spaces of classrooms (virtual and 'real') and the ways in which the covid crisis reshapes possibilities for resistance and change, and for imagining futures different from the past.

The advent of the pandemic radically disrupted our taken-for-granted patterns of daily life and pedagogical practices and, in our initial shock at having landed in a science fiction future, there were tentative hopes that the global crisis might be a forceful impetus towards alternative forms of social life, leading us to take better care of the earth and one another. Some even ventured that the impossible (in the very best sense) might have "already happened" (Solnit 2020). Arundhati Roy wrote a remarkable piece that has already become a touchstone classic, framing the pandemic as a "portal, a gateway between one world and the next." She captures the agitated, psychic activity that accompanied the slowing down of public social life, and the possibilities that the moment seemed to pose:

> *"Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality", trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. . . . [The pandemic] is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks, and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world".* (Roy 2020)

However, these provocations of creativity and reimagination coalesced with anxious attempts to realign these strange and estranging conditions with the world as we knew it, and strategies of containment and control were quickly mobilised to sustain and reassert structural hierarchies. Little more than a year passed before Roy (2021) wrote another reflection on the devastating impact of the pandemic on her home country, India, where the scintillas of more hopeful alternatives were occluded. Across the world, it became clear that "[t]hose who benefit most from the shattered status quo are often more focused on preserving or re-establishing it than protecting human life" (Solnit 2020). On this rocky ground, the poor once again become collateral damage in the scramble to consolidate and shore up the dysfunctional asymmetrical frameworks of social life.

The specific context of higher education in South Africa mirrored these global developments with an initial surge of hope that the pandemic might offer the potential for remaking the practices of learning-teaching in more humane and equal ways and towards the construction of a more just world. However, even small cracks in the edifice of the status quo were met with institutional resistance to change and anxious, defensive strategies, despite the widespread recognition that higher education was already in deep trouble, struggling with epistemic tensions and ethical questions in a world of economic austerity and deepening inequality. My narrative as a teacher is told in dialogue with the stories of students, with the textual traditions of narrative and other psychosocial theories, in interdisciplinary creative conversation with colleagues, and with voices from remarkable real-time political and social commentary in the global media space. This approach instantiates one of the primary provocations of the pandemic to my pedagogical practice: to render the boundaries between sources of knowledge and forms of knowledge-making, between theory and practice, between learning and living, more porous. The macro-politics of the global crisis are here concentrated in a seemingly insignificant educational space, framing the (im)possibilities for resistance in the "multiple micropolitical practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit . . . in tune with the present but resisting its murderous tendencies" (Braidotti 2010, p. 423).

2. Resistance and Decolonization: The Crisis beyond the Pandemic

Higher education is a hopeful domain for collective change and individual social mobility, the time and space for the development of thinking and practice to prepare for individual working lives, and for collective enquiry into past and present realities in the construction of future worlds. In the extended years of study required for entry

into the workplace, young people accumulate forms of "cultural capital" in its embodied, objectified, and institutional forms (Bourdieu 1986). However, access to this domain of education with its aspirational promise of social mobility is largely predetermined by prior forms of cultural capital acquired through the socialisation practices of schooling and families. The apartheid state understood the critical role of education in relation to participation in the economy and it was, therefore, an extremely important sector for the implementation of structural racism. With democratisation, increasing numbers of black students are enrolled for study, many first-generation students from families oppressed by the racist regime of the past. However, these transformational gains happen within more intransigent structural constraints as higher education is steeped in colonial history and implicated in contemporary unequal socioeconomic formations.

The uprising of the 2015/2016 Student Movement was a response to the disjuncture between the rhetoric of deracialised, open access to higher education, and the persistent exclusionary effects of socioeconomic inequality and epistemic violence. In a context of perpetual and deepening inequality, higher education becomes a conduit for perpetuating intergenerational privilege and the task of teaching becomes narrowly defined as ensuring the transmission of information and skills for participation in the higher echelons of the world of work. The possible forms of participation in knowledge production are pre-empted by the ways in which individual and collective imagination are channelled by the forces of history and the potentially emancipatory effects of learning are tamed and contained in a disciplinary and disciplining project that creates 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1988; Burman 2017). While this analysis applies to the linkages between education and the socio-economic organisation of all societies in the global order of late capitalism, in South Africa, class continues to be inflected by race and the flows of power in contemporary global and local dynamics.

The triumphant toppling of the Rhodes statue on the campus of the University of Cape Town early in 2015 was emblematic of long-standing demands for decolonisation, precipitating calls for another statue of Rhodes at Oriel College, Oxford to fall. Further acts of what Marvin Rees, the mayor of Bristol termed 'historical poetry' (Morris 2020) removed similar symbolic concretisations of colonialism and imperial conquest such as the statue of the slave-trader Edward Colston which was dumped into the Bristol canal. In addition to providing this impetus for resistance on the symbolic front elsewhere, the South African Student movement articulated the links between epistemic and material injustices, and between the colonial past and active currents of racism in the present (particularly as confronted by the resurgence of BLM in 2021 in the wake of George Floyd's murder). #FeesMustFall followed hot on the heels of #RhodesMustFall and significant gains were made for poor and working-class students. Loans from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) were converted to grants and eligibility was extended to include the so-called "missing middle". Solidarity with and from workers (cleaners, gardeners, and service providers) on university campuses brought an end to the iniquitous practice of outsourcing labour on many campuses (Motimele 2019). However, this struggle is far from over. Access to universities remains financially prohibitive and the burden of debt created by long years of study remains high for most students and their families. At the postgraduate level, we continue to cling to antiquated mythical notions of merit defined by raw scores, distributing funding in unfair and inaccurate ways that affect the present and future scholarship.

Against this recent history, the pandemic had devastating effects on an already struggling economy, swelling the burgeoning unemployment figures (according to recent stats, 34.9% or 46.6% on the expanded definition, with a shocking figure of 66.5% of youth unemployed). Glimpses of possibility lay in the surfacing of more serious mainstream consideration being given to proposals for a wealth tax and a universal basic income grant that had long been dismissed as unrealistic. However, there were no signs of such economic recalibration in the recently delivered national budget speech of 2022. Economists from the Institute for Economic Justice (among others) have again questioned the political

line that these measures are unaffordable on both ethical and rational grounds (Mncube 2022). The events of July 2021 in which more than 300 people were murdered in racist vigilante-style killings amidst widescale looting of shops and destruction of property make very clear that what we most certainly cannot afford is the perpetual failure of the state to address inequality and poverty. In higher education, these inequalities give lie to the myth of meritocracy and the crisis in student funding is a recurring nightmare exploding into consciousness at the start of each academic year. Writing before the pandemic, Motimele's (2019) analysis of the student movement critiques the pervasive effects of 'neoliberal time' in the commodification of higher education.

> *"Yet, the true rupture presented by the unified activism of students and workers was in the critique they presented of a neoliberalized university, hierarchical bureaucratic structures, an institutional culture still defined by whiteness, and dominant epistemological paradigms that foreclosed the possibility for an indigenous intellectual project. . . . the universities' insistence on the conclusion of the academic program (curriculum-time), the need to balance university financial books (capitalist-time), and the obsession with research output and student throughput (production-time) are all expressions of the dominance of neoliberal-time".* (Motimele 2019, p. 205)

The idea of the university as a public good, the equivalent of the democratic commons at the heart of society, is being eroded. The extensive privatisation of schooling in South Africa has widened the inequalities that were crudely racialised under apartheid. Universities, while still mostly ostensibly public, are in effect semi-privatised through fee structures. Despite the complex financial aid schemes that the state has established, primarily in response to the demands of #FMF, the effects of financial exclusion are extensive throughout the system, commodifying academic work (both research and teaching) in 'business units' that must perform competitively in the relentless march of neoliberal time (Motimele 2019). A recent newspaper article written by colleagues from the School of Education questions the university's current slogan for its centenary year, "Wits for Good", asking "For whose good, exactly?" (Ramoupi et al. 2021). Access to this 'good' is increasingly restricted the higher up the educational ladder one climbs. Higher education (particularly in highly select professional fields such as medicine, law, or psychology) resembles a giant pyramid scheme in which the investment of many delivers results for only a 'lucky' few. The myth of meritocracy generates what Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 1) describes as 'cruel optimism' in that what "you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing". The forms of life that characterise late capitalism and are infused in the practices of education, promise possibilities for this flourishing, "by the incoherence with which alienation is lived as exhaustion plus saturating intensity" (Berlant 2011, p. 166). These dehumanising conditions of life and learning are resisted in the logics of rage and despair as expressions of hope that the world might be differently organised (Canham 2018; Bradbury 2020). In 2021, student protests against financial exclusion were displaced into the streets of Johannesburg by the convergence of covid regulations and the refusal of university management to grant permission for protest action on campus. A member of the public, Mthokozisi Ntumba, was shot dead by police who opened fire on protesting students.

3. Resistance, Resilience, and Retreats in the COVID Crisis

It is evident that the crisis of the pandemic has been played out on a historical landscape littered with crises. However, the particular form of this disruption to our taken-for-granted practices created an immediate imperative to loosen our fixation with the established content, form, and processes of higher education in urgent and accelerated ways. This primarily entailed an uneven and rapid rollout of online learning in what was self-deprecatingly termed 'remote emergency' mode. In addition to widely disparate institutional resources (both human and material) across the sector, even within the most privileged institutions, there are serious inequalities across the student body making this emergency far more disastrous for some than others. These differential impacts are embed-

ded in precarious and crowded living conditions, uneven connectivity, excessively high data costs, for some, no computing devices, and for many, no reliable electricity supply.

In addition to these unequal parameters in the material and virtual worlds, there are moreover specific pedagogical problems that are our proper responsibility as teachers. There is little lost and perhaps something to be gained by transferring large class lectures to online asynchronous delivery, enabling students to watch and listen when they want with the added advantage of being able to fast forward through bits that are familiar or just boring or to replay sections that are unclear or difficult to grasp the first time around. Students have, in any case, long known this, asking friends or sometimes lecturers to record live lectures and it is an open secret that attendance at lectures was abysmally low before the pandemic terminated this particular form of mass communication. Nonetheless, writing before the pandemic, I expressed a prescient nervousness about the contradictory impact of the increasing range of the virtual world and the erosion of face-to-face interactions in education and other domains of social life:

> *"The explosion of information and the acceleration of communication across geographical, cultural, linguistic and other boundaries has empowering effects and, regardless, it is impossible for those of us in it to reimagine an existence without this dimension of the world. However, perhaps because I am not a digital native, I would argue that this virtual world can supplement but not supplant embodied face-to-face interaction in the space of the therapeutic room, in the classroom, in political gatherings or live performances, across family dining room tables and over coffee or wine with friends".* (Bradbury 2020, p. 168)

In its most hopeful articulations, the virtual world might serve to make the boundaries of universities porous, democratising access to knowledge and relational networks of meaning-making. However, it also extends new forms of imperialism and homogenising narratives, replicating the unequal architecture of the material world. The isolation of covid conditions was certainly mitigated by technology but these technical and technicist solutions to the 'uncontrollability' (Rosa 2020) of the situation, were not only unevenly available but also generated further anxious forms of alienation and loss.

Those of us who have been teaching for a long time know the experience of engaging with a new cohort of students with whom we may be reading and talking about texts that we have read many times before, alone or with other groups. Yet, something new emerges. Learning-teaching is a living process that emerges in the dialogical exchange between particular persons who bring their own life histories into the room and the dynamics between students are as important as between the lecturer and learners. Even when the virtual classroom allows for interactive exchange, this is typically dyadic between the teacher and a particular student who raises a question or poses a problem, atomising and further individuating learners. Masha Gessen (2020) says, " . . . we can't look one another in the eye, we can't read facial expressions, we are intensely and fruitlessly aware of performing, and we cannot reconcile our words, intentions, and environment." By analogy, we all know that while a live musical performance may be less perfect than a recording, the atmospheric experience for both listeners and artists is different in kind, decentring us in relation both to the music and to the other members of the audience, enhancing the power of the work to reveal new senses of the world and ourselves. Embodied experience is always multi-modal, involving all our senses, living and breathing in relation to others and, where the purposes of the gathering in place are expressly didactic, the nuances of these multiple interactions are exponentially valuable. The best classrooms entail much more than unidirectional instruction or dyadic exchange and in contexts such as South Africa where classes are very diverse, learning from other students is as critical as learning from texts and teachers. Of course, such interaction between students is possible online and the prevalence of social media means that this mode of interaction, particularly for young people, predated the pandemic. There is much to be said for the promise of these spaces that escape the strictures of physical space and the imposition of teachers' structuring. However, paradoxically these spaces have divisive effects too, not only because participation in

them requires resources such as smartphones and data, but also because these spaces may often become little more than echo-chambers or, where contestation does occur, it is quick and dirty with a focus on closing down rather than opening up debates. In addition, the commodification of knowledge is intensified rather than reduced in virtual space, most notably in the proliferation of essay mills and similar sites offering shortcuts to credits.

In language that resonates with Levinas's (1963) notion of "face", Brabazon suggests that the humanising potential of education is lost or at least undermined by the loss of embodied encounters:

> *"Education is also a humanising experience "that involves questioning and altering one's sense of self and one's relationship to others. Humans learn through narrative, context, empathy, debate, and shared experiences. We are able to open ourselves up enough to ask difficult questions and allow ourselves to be challenged only when we are able to see the humanity in others and when our own humanity is recognised by others.".* (Brabazon 2021)

4. Everyday Academic Life: Learning-Teaching in the Pandemic

To illustrate the impact of the pandemic on the everyday worlds of teaching and learning in a more granular way, I will focus on tasks redesigned and engaged within the peculiarly accelerated and slow-motion zone when the pandemic first hit in March 2020. My honours course, "narratives of youth identities", began on campus with face-to-face seminars where I confronted the usual challenges of working with a large, diverse group of students, all anxious right from the get-go about the competitive filtering of the year that would determine who would attain the extremely limited desired placement in psychology master's programmes. It was a great group, highly engaged with one another, the texts, and with me, and I was experiencing my usual adrenal rush in meeting new young people on the cusp of their promising adult futures. Six weeks into the academic year, in a frenzied rush, students were evicted from university residences and all of us were barred from campus and sent home for the initial three-week strict lockdown period when we could not leave our houses at all. For some students, these homes were the places from which they had been on a daily commute to campus, but many departed to more distant places elsewhere across the country. This was a moment "full of both the best and worst possibilities. We [were] both becalmed and in a state of profound change" (Solnit 2020).

Home is usually understood as a place of retreat from the world for relaxation and rejuvenation, the place where we can let our defences down and be most freely ourselves. Those whom we trust to enter our most personal space are invited to "make yourselves at home." By contrast, university space is experienced by many students, particularly black students, as alienating and inhospitable (Bradbury and Kiguwa 2012). However, the characterisation of these spaces in these contrasting binary terms is an oversimplification. University life also provides an escape from family life and, while the encounter with new ideas and practices may feel threatening, it also provokes possibilities for reimagining selves and worlds. Homes may also, for many people, particularly women, not be places of safety and support. To illustrate, like many women all over the world, psychology honours student, Zandile Ndongeni's[1] move back home meant that she had to juggle mothering and household responsibilities on a daily basis as she completed her tasks for the course.

> *I was in my room trying to study online during the day. My daughter was banging on my door because she and her cousin-brother were fighting about which cartoon channels to watch. . . . She was crying because her cousin-brother bit her hand for the TV remote control. I decided to put her on my back so that I can continue with my schoolwork as there was no one else in the house to calm her down. This lockdown has made me realise how difficult it is to balance being a student and a mother. This struggle has always been there, but it intensified even more since the lockdown.* [2]

Disorientated and without our usual physical and psychological bearings, it was simply unimaginable that this strange life would morph along with viral mutations in

long, rolling waves for years to come, and initially, the academic programme was paused in an early, slightly extended first quarter break. However, our blank computer screens were soon flooded with instructions to get the academic year "back on track". Increasing levels of surveillance over the previous few years subsequent to #Feesmustfall had been only weakly resisted by students and staff with fairly quick capitulation to mechanisms such as fingerprint access to the public space of the campus. With the move to online learning, the tentacles of bureaucratic control extended beyond the restricted zone of campus and into the private space of our homes and into the personal time of evenings and weekends. The effect was to automate the educational domain, undercutting decades of experience in classrooms and in academic fields of expertise. In relation to content, we were instructed to cut anything superfluous. This may have productive value and it was indeed remarkable to see how colleagues who have clung to ostensibly essential components found it possible to finally let some things go, things that were superfluous all along. Particularly for undergraduate students, content, which is, in any case, quickly forgotten (Miller et al. 1999), is far less important than learning the methods and forms of academic practice and so the need to pay greater attention to what it is that students need to know at different levels could be pedagogically productive and potentially challenge colonial disciplinary canons. With one caveat: this narrowing of focus is accompanied by stricter time frames and distance creates the need for increased specificity and clear instructions for independent activity. We do need to provide road maps for reading as we already know all too well that access to amassing piles of internet information does not translate into better thinking and writing. However, tightening the connections between reading and assessment funnels students down narrow pathways of material that is essential, not for life or for critical enquiry, but for examination to ensure that course metrics are unaffected by any disruptive alterations to pedagogy and curricula. Where answers are unknown not only to students but to teachers too, the world of university study and research is better navigated in more exploratory open-ended ways.

In the honours course, we continued to read and talk about narrative theory although I did reduce the amount of reading and cut some seminars altogether. These adjustments were not out of concern about remaining on track and I did not concede that the volume of reading that I had initially prescribed was excessive. However, I recognised both the difficulties with sustained concentration and the more pressing concerns of life that diverted our energies and attention—mine as much as those of students! Not all the effects of this devastating crisis were negative. One enormous benefit of the virtual zoom-room was that I was able to invite international scholars, Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Ann Phoenix, whose work we were reading, to join the class for guest seminars. In 2021, my master's class was able to attend a conference 'in Finland' at the invitation of Erica Burman who was delivering a keynote address. These generous exchanges were invigorating for students, enabling connections between research and teaching, and providing access to intellectual forums that would have been beyond reach in-person.

The key shift in my pedagogical approach was to foreground and enhance the creative and exploratory tasks that had always been part of the course: narrative interviewing and reflexive personal narratives. These tasks provided a forum for reflexivity and intergenerational work and were paradoxically creatively enhanced by the conditions of lockdown through proximity to family members and introspective time and space. Students interviewed their grandparents in person in multi-generational households or over the phone, or with their parents about their grandparents' lives. Living at home and living *only* at home and working mainly online provided scope for creative and multi-modal reflexive narratives, with the class producing between them a largescale painting, dance performances, musical playlists, and video/photographic essays. While I have been incorporating visual methods in my research practice for a long while (see, for example, Bradbury 2017; Bradbury and Kiguwa 2012), facilitating the making of knowledge in this way had not been an explicit part of my teaching praxis. The objects produced were quite remarkable, creative, and innovative, playing to individual strengths and utilising forms

of meaning-making that were unfamiliar to me both because they lie outside of my disciplinary expertise and because of generational leaps in technology. The tasks criss-cross the boundaries of theoretical study and life experience, private and public worlds, connecting the past and present. Responsive teaching of this kind, increasing the scope of tasks and the weighting of this kind of evaluation of learning, is typically discouraged in a context of increasing commodification of education, where rigid templates for content and form are required in advance and must be spelt out in detail. Institutional resistance to learning means that while the pandemic temporarily loosened such mechanisms of control and surveillance, these have congealed in enhanced bureaucratic systems that are perhaps even easier to enforce through the permanent traces of the virtual terrain than in the ephemeral happenings of real-world events.

5. Communities of Praxis

Alongside my virtual classrooms, I was participating in multiple online groups focused on socio-political questions, some specifically related to higher education such as perpetual battles with student funding, but others more general, engaging with PPE scandals, vaccination hoarding, austerity measures, poverty, and unemployment, violent policing, and Black Lives Matter. However, one forum that proved both therapeutic and creative for my educational praxis had a less explicitly political agenda. A colleague from anthropology invited me to join a loose collaborative group of academics across multiple disciplines (anthropology, history, law, psychology), and from three different South African universities, ranging from people in relatively senior academic management roles to young early-career scholars. We gathered virtually, sharing information about the virus, trying to make sense of fluid data that did not fit any of our existing frameworks, sometimes reflecting on wider socio-political issues affecting all of us, sometimes discussing specific teaching and learning issues but mostly, we just talked, often for a few rambling hours at the end of the day before or while making supper, almost like old friends despite the fact that we were mostly strangers who had never met in the flesh. We swapped stories about institutional struggles, of contraband cigarettes, or whined about the lack of wine in our fridges, we talked about food and music and growing things, about new or revived craft activities, and shared worries about students and family members who were vulnerable to both physical infection and the rampant contagion of mental health troubles. We laughed a lot.

The kind of support we provided each other was shaped by the particular combination of intimacy and distance, different from the personal circles of family and friendship but also quite different from institutional offers of helplines and online counselling or the multiple surveys we were enjoined to complete to assess the wellbeing of staff. I can only imagine that my wariness around these official channels and platforms was possibly more acute for students (who know that the same institutional structures will evaluate their success or failure) and can only hope that students were able to coalesce in similar protective and resistant forums. However, I also know that many colleagues and students were not so fortunate and had to develop individual resilience in isolation. This unstructured space provided essential support to resist the impact of frenetic and anxious virtual institutional meetings in which keeping the academic programme "on track" was the overriding concern. A WhatsApp exchange between three of us on a Sunday morning triggered nostalgic childhood memories and encouraged a more creative formulation of the reflexive narrative task for my students along the lines of the memory box project of the late 1990s/early 2000s at the height of the Aids pandemic (see, for example, Denis 2005).

Zimitri: *Morning friends. A beautiful morning here in Jozi. I've started a box into which I put objects of my Corona life.*

Pia: *Did you make that box yourself? It's beautiful 😊 if it is a memory-style box, I'll crochet you a unicorn to add. To remind you of our conversation and space*

Zimitri: *The box came to me last year from my Dan on Valentine's Day. It was filled with lovely things . . . . I would love that, Pia! Thank you. Exactly . . . like a memory box.*

Pia: *Great, I thought of making us each one, appropriating Charm's totem and creating an object to remind us that we were able to make a magical space amidst this messiness.*
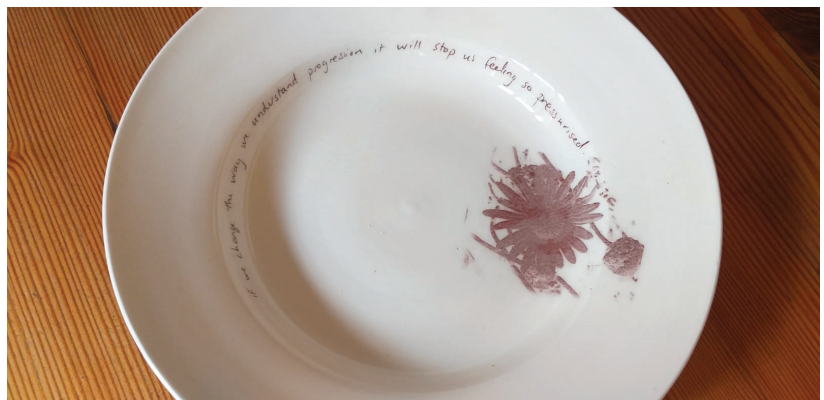
Zimitri: *The plate you see is my neighbour's. When either one of us cooks a delicious meal we prepare a generous plate for the other. Pass it through or over the fence. When I was a baby and my mother started working, she would wrap me up and pass me over the wood 'n iron fence to our neighbour. She was Mrs Pearce. Will send you the chapter of my book . . . if you don't have my book.[3] I want to ask my neighbour if I can keep that plate? How else to make it part of my box? Just a picture?*

Pia: *Plate is beautiful. Message is meaningful. I'm sure your neighbour will happily gift it. Passing food over the fence is a generous gift*

Zimitri: *Wow! When we think together! The beauty that emerges!*

Jill: *Thank you for this wonderful Sunday morning visual conversation!*

Pia: *Jill, you should dry one of your pansies. Or more than one, and make us each a card.*

Jill: *I have designed a task for my honours class (narratives of youth identities) to create a narrative diary of life under lockdown and have suggested they use whatever modality they wish . . . sound, visual, or written . . . could I send these images as an example?*

Zimitri: *Of course!*

Jill: *thanks! . . . Ah! Pressed dried flowers . . . I had forgotten. My Mom and I used to do this when I was a kid . . .*

Pia: *Yes of course. I love pansies, and often grow them. But in future, they will remind me of you, what a lovely gift to have you in my garden*

Zimitri: *Yes. I am going to find stuff on pansies and will share. Pensiere[4] . . . is that how you spell it, Pia?*

Jill: *You have both soooooo cheered me up this morning! Have a beautiful day.*

This conversation ranges across time and space, narrating childhood stories of mothers, incorporating our memories of the earlier pandemic and its devastation, but simultaneously alive to our active narration and memory-making in the present that we were experiencing as simultaneously exceptional and quotidian. These simple, meandering conversations may be read as forms of resistance to the pressure to conform to the shrinking space and time of digital meeting rooms, facilitating creativity and linking personal meaning-making with public forms of knowledge construction.

6. A Narrative of Three Generations of Women: Reflecting in the Mess

On the back of this conversation, I re-conceptualised the reflexive narrative task for my honours course. The individual story of Fezeka Hlophe in dialogue with her mother's and grandmother's stories as told through her own narrative version of the memory box or

time-capsule illustrates how the task enabled her to make sense of the entangled threads of loss and hope in the experience of everyday life in the time of COVID. Fezeka records in her diary:

> *"Today the one thing I was dreading happened. We received news that my mom unfortunately got retrenched. . . . Today is Sunday so Ma made the typical Sunday dinner. Earlier we both took a walk to the local vendor get pumpkin. During the walk, Ma told me about how serious she was about her education. She studied extra hard when she was around my age so she could live a good life and she could not have imagined that her life would turn out the way it has. . . . It really pains me when she talks like this, and it wasn't the first time I heard this from her. This makes me question life . . . How can someone who is a hard worker, someone who does everything by the book suffer like this? When will she get a steady income? A good reliable job so she can have peace."*

Unemployment statistics and large-scale job losses due to the pandemic are given a face in Fezeka's story, and the despair about the lost promises of education in her mother's life resonates anxiously in the context of her own studies. In this same week, the family lost their (grand)mother and she describes the mourning rituals happening in parallel with everyday life under lockdown.

> *Today my uncle, brothers and I bought a goat that will be needed for the ceremony. This cleansing ritual strictly requires a white female goat. Me, not knowing anything about my culture and using this opportunity to learn more, I asked my mom why this was so and she replied that the goat needs to be female because the person we lost in our family is female. She then continued to explain that the coat of the goat has to be white because white symbolizes purity and cleanliness which is what we will need to wash away the darkness caused by death. This picture shows the goat that we bought.*

The story of the goat tells of loss and connection across generations. Although she professes her ignorance, she is probably also explaining these cultural practices to me, opening a window into her world that would ordinarily lie outside of my experience and outside of classroom discussion. After the funeral, she writes an extraordinarily hopeful entry.

> *Today I felt hopeful for the future also considering that everything went well . . . so I wanted to express that by being yellow . . . I am not artistic at all lol but anyway to me bright yellow signifies happiness, joy, and of course brightness . . . . So, I wore a yellow*

top and made sure to include yellow when I did my makeup as shown by the picture below.

In a moving juxtaposition of hope and loss, of youth and old age, she photographs her grandmother's sister (above) whom she calls 'granny-aunt' despite the fact that this irritates the older lady.

> *What saddens me is that while I was taking pictures of her one of my aunts and my mom encouraged me saying 'we might need them one day' which implies that we may need them for her obituary. She is old and during the funeral of my late gran she called all of us into the room and she pleaded with my aunts to help bury her when the time comes because she has three children and only one is currently working. . . . Well, typing this is making me go back to our conversations during the time of the funeral where she told me that she would wish to go, sleeping, when no one is in the house. Like how do you live knowing your death is near . . . even practically preparing for it? Ai, anyway I will enjoy her while I still have her and appreciate her and the guidance she gives us, 'cause she is the only elder we as a family have left.*

7. Intergenerational Dialogues in a Landscape of Loss

The interviews provide poignant insight into intimate, tender exchanges between young people and their (grand) parents, telling quotidian stories of growing grapevines or roses, sailing boats or fixing cars, of beloved barking dogs, of walking to school along dusty pathways, sharing favourite recipes and foods, cooking on fires and studying by candlelight. In some cases, these everyday narratives were punctuated by more dramatic turning points, revealing family secrets of love affairs, the loss of babies, or violent child abuse. These family histories coincided with the conflictual decades of apartheid and the stories of black grandparents were often explicitly marked by forced removals and involuntary migration from rural to urban places, exiles, and family separations, truncated and interrupted schooling, and experiences of brutal political violence. Since these intergenerational stories end in the present, in the lives of the students who conducted the interviews, they are also stories of resistance and resilience. However, these more hopeful interpretations of family trajectories are tentative and provisional, challenged by current crises of inequality, austerity, and racism, exacerbated by the pandemic, which make it difficult to read these narratives only in terms of agency and overcoming.

Fezeka Hlophe, whose mother lost her job and her own mother (Fezeka's grandmother) during the time of the interview, expresses her gratitude and awareness of the strain on her mother's life. Mother and daughter collaborate on the task in the shared wish for her to "do well".

Fezeka: *Mm Ok. Oh, okay thank you, thank you so much Ma for giving me your time to do this interview because I know that you are tired and you've just had a back and forth from Free State and you already said you are tired so thank you for umm giving me this time that I need to do my task.*

Mum: *[laughs softly].*

Fezeka: *Yeah, [laughing softly].*

Mum: *Okay, I am tired, very tired but I'm happy to, to help you with this task of yours because I want so much for you to . . .*

Fezeka: *To do well . . .*

Mum: *To, to do well.*

Fezeka: *Okay Ma thank you, thank you.*

Robyn Brand's grandfather expressed a similar investment in his granddaughter's success. This conversation was the last time they spoke as he died shortly thereafter. In the interview, perhaps with unconscious urgency, he shared very traumatic childhood memories with her, leaving this precious record for her memory.

Robyn: *Ja, flip, Right Grandpa, I'm going it there for tonight if that's ok with you.*

Grandpa: *And I hope that was a bit of help, Robs. I don't know.*

Robyn: *Ja, thank you. Thank you so, so much Grandpa*

Grandpa: *You, you probably failed the test anyway . . .*

Robyn: *[laughs]*

Grandpa: *. . . Talking, talking to an old fart like me.*

Robyn: *No man. It's so interesting getting to like know your life-story a bit better. . . . Ja, no, thank you so much for like letting me like . . . well, sharing your life with me if I could say that.*

Grandpa: *Er, ja well, as I say, I don't . . . I don't often do it with anyone but if it can help you, then I'm happy with that.*

Robyn: *[laughs] Thanks Grandpa.*

Grandpa: *Ok then honey.*

Robyn: *Sleep tight.*

Grandpa: *Ok, we'll keep in touch.*

Redirecting the focus of academic tasks into the familial context of home enabled relational intergenerational learning in poignant intimate exchanges, emotionally concentrated by the context of collective grief and loss, expressing tender mutuality. The question is whether these fragile links between home and the academy can continue to be strengthened once we return to campus. Theoretical enquiry should enable students to reflect on their everyday lives and relationships in new ways and forms of meaning-making that are typically excluded from classrooms and have the potential to enliven and invigorate academic exchange.

Working with students in their homes from my own home created a strange new transparency between our personal lives that is typically mediated by the public space of the campus. The atomisation of distance and isolation paradoxically provoked greater attention to the worlds of students and altered the tone and texture of our engagements. To teach with an eye only on the hopeful future without attending to repetitive cycles of grief in the present became untenable under the conditions of the covid crisis and as a teacher, I was provoked by the challenge issued by the philosopher Agnes Callard:

"Now is an apt time to ponder the fact that the human condition means living under the shadow of death. It is an apt time to situate the present in the broad sweep of history.

> *Deprived of the reality of human connection, we are at least in a position to appreciate the idea of it. And, given that many of us are teachers, we should also be able to communicate this to others—to offer them a way out of numbness and anxiety".* (Callard 2020)

In some cases, grief and loss were very close to home: one of the students lost her grandmother in the weeks before the interview and another lost her grandfather a few months after the interview. These were not covid losses, but many subsequently were, and the terrain of teaching-learning became wracked with loss and grief. In 2021, a student in my honours class lost five family members to covid in a matter of months. Several colleagues suffered similar inconceivable family losses; the academy lost several leading scholars, including my beloved friend and closest research partner, Bhekizizwe Peterson. While death is always a part of the natural flow of life, the pervasiveness of grief and loss during the pandemic has often meant that multiple people are suffering such losses simultaneously. These waves of collective loss in the strange isolation and disconnection of Covid deeply unsettled the ordinary world of teaching-learning. However, as Peterson himself was always conscious, the "individual and social presence of melancholia" (Peterson 2019, p. 360) is not a new aberration but rather, continues to rearticulate traumatic history in what he hauntingly referred to as "black spectrality". Perhaps these are the conditions under which we were always working, but the pandemic surfaced these surging flows of black death and mourning (Canham 2021) in ways that made turning one's face away in ignorance less possible[5]. In as much as the stark realities of my students were rendered more visible, I was also more conscious of my own positionality as an educator in the virtual classroom, teaching from the comfort of a middle-class (mostly) white suburb. In this landscape of inequality and loss, we need to generate a 'cartography' that accounts for our "locations in terms of both space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical and genealogical dimension) and [to] provide alternative figurations or schemes of representation for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (potestas) but also empowering or affirmative (potential)" (Braidotti 2010, p. 410).

8. Risk, Serendipity, and Learning

In one of our zoom sessions under the strict lockdown conditions of the first wave of the covid crisis, another student in the honours class named Joshua Labuschagne exclaimed in exasperation, "I just want to go to a bar in the chance of meeting my husband!" I replied, "I just want to go to a bar in the chance of meeting someone other than my husband!" Despite both enjoying the relative ease and comfort of middle-class homes, being contained there in the loving familiarity of family felt like entrapment. As a young gay man, the lockdown robbed Joshua of social space in which "to be himself" in relation to others, creating a distorted temporality in which future possibilities are truncated and the horizon of adulthood seems infinitely deferred. While my response was somewhat flippant and intended to produce the laughter that it did, I too was missing the possibilities of the world outside of the known, keenly feeling the loss of serendipity and spontaneity of chance encounters. It took me a while to realise that in addition to missing my particular cohorts of masters and honours students and the frame of the seminar room in which to talk, I was also missing the things that happen on the edges of these scheduled events, where people settle in and talk to one another about anything and everything, the conversations that happen at the end of class, walking back to my office. Beyond this, the vibrancy of campus, a world of strangers and noise, the possibilities for glancing, accidental meetings and exchanges, the possibility for encountering someone or something new, for chancing upon a book on a library shelf while purposely searching for something else entirely. Education entails "the 'beautiful risk' of human interaction, the relational encounter where human beings come together to influence each other with words and interpretations that work to forge and sustain a common world" (Di Paolantonio 2016, p. 149).

Scholarly work also requires extended periods of withdrawal from these noisy, embodied exchanges to solitary spaces for reading, writing, and thinking. Working from home might seem like a gift for those of us who find the notion of office hours antithetical

to creative, reflective intellectual work. However, the isolation of lockdown was not this. Following Hannah Arendt's (1973) casting of the alienation of loneliness as a forceful tool of the totalitarian state, Masha Gessen (2020) puts it wonderfully bluntly: "Loneliness . . . makes me sad and stupid. Solitude—the opportunity to work alone while still being able to feed on human connection—makes me think." The retreat into middle-class homes may ordinarily provide comfortable contexts for this kind of solitary intellectual work but, even without the strangely isolating effects of the pandemic, for many students, home is crowded, not only in terms of space but also in terms of demands on their time and by persistent implication in the entanglements of family relationships. In addition to the vibrant possibilities of human encounters and novelty, campus may provide the very best place for escaping into productive solitude. Although the world of reading and writing requires a retreat from social life, Njabulo Ndebele (1991, p. 139) resuscitates a positive perspective on the risks of learning. "[W]riting is essentially a subversive act. It has the powerful capability to invade in a very intimate manner, the world of the reader. Whenever you read, you risk being affected in a manner that can change the course of your life." The trajectories of reading may be controlled by canonical histories and colonial curricula, but university students are able to roam with considerable personal and political freedom into textual territories of their own choosing.

In a society such as South Africa, university education provides exceptional opportunities to engage across historical fault-lines of race and class, bringing black and white, rich and poor students into the same space for learning. However, alongside these thrilling enticements to learn from others, there are dangers in these embodied encounters, entailing misrecognition and misunderstanding. Educational 'contact zones' (Mary Louise Pratt 1991) have to be carefully constructed to attend to these dynamics. As Braidotti (2010, p. 411) observes: "Dis-identification involves the loss of cherished habits of thoughts and representation, which can also produce fear, sense of insecurity and nostalgia. . . . Changes that affect one's sense of identity are especially delicate." For white students, secure in their dominant normative positionality, such challenges to identity may be defensively resisted. Such resistance may converge with institutional resistance to change, obstructing learning and imagination. Conversely, for black students, the university is often experienced as an alienating space, rendering the risk of learning and change, threatening rather than exciting. Chabani Manganyi's (1973) analysis of 'being black in the world' highlights the condition of "freedom in security" (Manganyi 1973, p. 32) as essential for the realisation of human potential. The liberating possibilities of risk-taking in learning are paradoxically only fully released in the security of belonging, when one can " . . . inhabit a space to the extent that one can say, 'This is my home. I am not a foreigner. I belong here'. This is not hospitality. It is not charity" (Mbembe 2016, p. 30). In addition to questions of structural power and the decolonisation of disciplinary canons, pedagogical praxis engages these power differentials at the interpersonal level, in the dynamics of classrooms, between students and teachers, and across the diverse student body. Education infused with "confrontational love" (Hooks 2000) has the potential to generate a radical openness to the world and to others, enabling the imagination of alternative hopeful futures. This is a form of political resistance that strengthens individual agency and collective relationality. "Careful curiosity opens up an appreciation of historical contingency: that things might have been and so might yet still be, otherwise" (van Dooren 2014, p. 293).

The educational task is not only to construct pathways for students to think, read and write themselves into traditions of (textual) knowledge, but also to work at meaning-making in the 'borderlands' (following Gloria Anzaldúa (Fine 2018)) between the personal and political, between generations, and between the everyday world of experience and the abstract worlds of theory. In some ways, the virtual classroom is, by definition, a kind of 'borderland', a zone that exists on the margins of our embodied worlds, in which, place and time are disrupted. The experiences that I have reflected on in this paper suggest that there may be exciting pedagogical and knowledge-making practices released in this terrain where no one is fully at home, particularly enhancing individual creativity and en-

couraging autodidactic reflexive attention to the everyday world. However, asynchronous disembodied online learning inevitably lends itself most easily to the unidirectional transmission of information with the teacher (and her texts, oral or visual) as the focal point. This is tendency is exacerbated when the people gathering in the zoom room have never met in-person before or have no opportunities to do so alongside these virtual learning sessions. The honours class whose narratives are woven into this article had navigated first encounters with each other and with me on campus at the start of the academic year and so were not entirely unknown to one another and had already started working together in small groups. By contrast, where meeting is exclusively virtual, barriers (particularly of class and race) between students may be reinscribed as they can quite literally avoid eye-contact with one another, avoid (mis)recognising one another, avoid confrontation and contestation. The risks of embodied encounters are high, particularly "in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths" (Pratt 1991, p. 34). However, these are the requisite risks for (un)learning the past, resisting the way things are in the present, and reimagining future possibilities. Whether learning is online or in-person, we need to resist the erosion of "contact zones" which are as vital to learning as "zones of proximal development".

9. In Conclusion: Resistance and Hopeful Futures

Reflecting on the ways in which the pandemic brought death into everyday consciousness, the psychoanalyst, Jacqueline Rose, suggests that confronting our mortality may be politically productive.

> *"What on earth, we might then ask, does the future consist of once the awareness of death passes a certain threshold and breaks into our waking dreams? What, then, is the psychic time we are living? How can we prepare—can we prepare—for what is to come? If the uncertainty strikes at the core of inner life, it also has a political dimension. Every claim for justice relies on belief in a possible future, even when—or rather especially when—we feel the planet might be facing its demise".* (Rose 2021)

Living through these conditions of planetary and personal precarity, it has often felt difficult to prepare for the present let alone the unknown future. However, writing this article at a time that seems it might finally be the beginning-of-the-end, the threat of the pandemic is already mutating into the danger of forgetting. Although teaching and learning under the conditions of the pandemic were characterised by loss and grief, the disruption to established practices created cracks in the present through which to glimpse more hopeful futures (Eagleton 2016). However, the experimental possibilities of more equal and humanising praxis are frangible and already eroding. The technicist solutions of online learning are far more compatible with the commodification of higher education and metrics of success and perhaps the pandemic will retrospectively be identified as accelerating and extending this technological trajectory rather than changing the direction of human life in any fundamental way. In a way that can only be described as uncanny, Braidotti (2010) repeats the phrase, "we are in *this* together" as she traces humanity's nomadic wanderings in space and time. This became the rallying cry of politicians (particularly but not only in the UK) to mobilise people to act en masse in unprecedented and peculiar ways to contain the pandemic. However, as the corona virus spawned new variants, the meaning of "being in this together" likewise mutated and it soon became clear we might be in the same storm, but we were riding the waves in very different boats.

In the strong version of what it means to be in the world 'together', we are called to

> *" . . . [a] double commitment, on the one hand to processes of change and on the other to a strong sense of community—of our being in* this *together. Our co-presence, that is to say the simultaneity of our being in the world together, sets the tune for the ethics of our interaction".* (Braidotti 2010, p. 408)

The COVID crisis disrupted routine patterns and practices across all spheres of everyday life, rupturing social relations and destabilising our capacity for building coherent

selves and communities. However, despite the extraordinarily estranging impact of the pandemic, these conditions were continuous with catastrophic historical conditions before, and with the resurgent forms of dehumanising inequality and conflict in its immediate aftermath. Institutions and individuals alike are resistant to learning the lessons of fragility and fungibility of life. Learning to resist is therefore an unfinished process requiring critique and hope. In its best articulations, higher education is a space for intergenerational dialogue, connecting the past and future through memory and imagination to animate creative action in the present.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 All students referred to in this article granted permission to present their stories, for which I am very thankful. Their choice to be identified by their real names rather than pseudonyms, suggests that these tasks were experienced as authentically connected to their lives rather than merely performed for credit.

2 Data extracts are presented verbatim with only very light editing for readability.

3 The story to which Zimitri refers is found in her book, "*Race Otherwise*": "When I was a baby my mother wrapped and handed me to Mrs Pearce thought he gate in the zinc fence between out fomes. She minded me while my mother taught at Gelvandale Primary School. Twice daily, Mrs Pearce or a member of her family, often accompanied by one or two children, visited our back yard to fetch water from our newly plumbed, lit and lawned home. She cooked on a primus stove, the same one on which she heated the hot-comb used to style her hair. Her home was wrapped in the smell of paraffin and laced with the smell of starch, freshly solidifying under the iron which was also heated on the paraffin stove. During winter, when we used a paraffin heater to keep warm, our home smelt like hers. It also smelt of Lavender Cobra floor polish, Surf washing powder, Sunlight soap, Sheen hair straightener, police uniforms, home-baked bread, shoe polish used to spit-and-shine, the blue scribbles of my mother's pupils and Goya Magnolia talcum powder—signs of a family steeped in working class respectability" (Erasmus 2017, p. 11).

4 Pia Bombardella's mother tongue is Italian and, in an earlier conversation about pansy-growing, she mentioned that 'pansy' has the same route as 'pensiere' meaning to 'to think'. Together with our conversation about the Afrikaans name, 'gesiggies' (literally translated as 'faces') these little flowers were imbued with meaning beyond their prettiness.

5 I have written more extensively about white ignorance, the implications for teaching, and possibilities for learning and change, elsewhere. See chapter four, *(Mis)understandings and active ignorance*, in (Bradbury 2020), *Narrative Psychology and Vygotsky in dialogue: Changing subjects*.

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