

About Resonance

Abstract

This introduction to the special issue of Inter Faculty, volume 10, takes up the theme of resonance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its ensuing societal shifts. It gives a short commentary of the individual studies presented here, placing them within the wider consideration of the planet-wide turning point facing humanity in relation to the natural world.

Keywords: resonance, violence-care, exploitation-solidarity, exclusion-inclusion, fear, modernity, turning point, natural world

1. The Covid-19 Pandemic and Resonance

The focus of this Special Issue is to discuss and question the concerns facing our society and our way of life that have been exacerbated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

December 2019, Wuhan, Hubei Province, People's Republic of China, the first outbreak of a novel coronavirus was confirmed. January 30th, 2020 the novel coronavirus was rated a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organisation. On March 11th, 2020 it was declared a pandemic, generally termed Covid-19.

As yet, there is no effective treatment for Covid-19 and preventive vaccines are still awaiting certified approval. The only means we have of trying to control the spread of the virus is to wear masks, wash hands and gargle, and keep a social distance one from the other. Here in Japan, 'avoiding the Three Cs' – closed spaces, crowds and close-contact situations - has become a way of life, a new normal of everyday living. The world over similar preventive slogans have been adopted, as there is no other way to protect ourselves from this virus than to follow such lifestyles to the letter.

Our desire to protect ourselves from infectious disease is almost instinctive. No-one can escape the fear of being attacked by an invisible virus and the danger of dying

from it. But we have seen how such fear and anxiety also leads to cruel, even criminal acts - exclusion of the sick, discrimination and forceful detention of 'outsiders' perceived as carriers of the virus whether they are or not, forbidding family members to approach their dying or departed loved ones for a final embrace, a final goodbye, ... We have seen how fear and anxiety have become mixed with frustration and anger, how, with a surfeit of information where fact and fiction, not to say outright falsehoods, are inseparable, segregation and discrimination have become commonplace. We have seen egoism and profiteering in the hoarding and reselling of essential goods, such as disinfectant alcohol and masks, not to mention toilet paper! It is a familiar situation, not dissimilar to Manzoni's *The Betrothed (I promessi sposi)*, in which the characters suffer from hysteria, falsehoods and fear of outsiders in the plague-ridden seventeenth century city of Milan.

In this context, as neither politicians nor infectious disease scientists, we cannot actually propose 'behavioural regulations' for the current situation, nor can we develop cures or vaccines. Nevertheless, as researchers, we are bound, at least from the point of view of the Humanities and Social Sciences, to observe, analyse and account for the shifts in contemporary society caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and to carefully reflect on the acute problems that have been made apparent. Thus, we decided to contact our colleagues, principally from our partner universities, in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa. This was in May 2020 while France was still under national lockdown. We invited them to contribute a paper for the present special issue of *Inter Faculty* expressing their reactions to the pandemic and its consequences. In short to give voice, as a scholar and a researcher, to their personal perceptions and reflections on the upheavals that were taking place and the implications for the future. Immediately, we received eighteen manuscripts in response.

There was a poetic response, literature and art. A response to language, to music. There was popular psychology, fear, anxiety and dogma. Urban closures and virtual masses. Inequality, discrimination and alienation. Restrictions on mobility, immigration controls, lockdowns. There was also solidarity, healing, hope, schools, education, even visions for the international community, the transformation of civilisation, history and civilisation, a new humanity.... The words were full of passion, the texts rebounding one off the other in a veritable movement of resonance.

A resonance created in the movement of different tones in tune with each other. Exceeding even our own aims for *Resonance*.

2. Pandemics and warnings from the ‘natural world’

There have been several infectious diseases of a global scale over the past three decades. Avian influenza H5N1 (1997), severe acute respiratory syndrome SARS (2003), novel influenza (2009), severe febrile thrombocytopenia SFTS (2011), Middle East respiratory syndrome MERS (2012), avian influenza H7N9 (2013), Ebola hemorrhagic fever (2014) and others (Okabe 2015: 167). Experts have made concrete developments in prevention, diagnosis and treatment by identifying the viruses that cause these infectious diseases and studying them thoroughly. But why is there such an explosion of infectious diseases on a global scale? The Covid-19 virus explosion in particular is worldwide, the only exceptions being the Arctic and Antarctic. It goes without saying that rigorous scientific evidence and data analysis is needed to determine the cause of a disease, but it is almost certain that the Ebola, avian influenza and SFTS viruses are transmitted to humans from animals. This point seems worthy of attention.

As globalisation progresses, the natural environment is being destroyed. At the same time extreme urbanisation is taking place. People’s lifestyles and eating habits are changing dramatically. Contact with wild animals is increasing, farming and breeding of domestic animals constantly developing and expanding. In fact, it would seem that the harmony and equilibrium between the cycle of nature and the cycle of consumption by humans has been disrupted beyond repair. Ultimately, the global outbreak of infectious diseases may be seen as a warning from the natural world against globalisation on a scale never seen before.

The ‘natural world’ here refers to the system of matter, energy, space and time that the 4.6-billion-year-old planet Earth has produced and evolved, and the world of life that has arisen and developed in all its diversity over the past 3.8 billion years. The Earth and its ecosystem of life is nothing less than the natural world. In the modern and contemporary era, human beings, as part of the natural world, are destroying this ecosystem in order to promote their own survival and satisfy their own desires. Human society from modern times to the present day has been

characterised by violence, exploitation and exclusion. But our time has reached a critical turning point and we do not know what the world will look like afterwards.

As Eric Macé points out, the Covid-19 pandemic is, from a modern point of view, humanity's battle against the onslaught of a novel coronavirus, a metaphor for war. In fact, on March 16th, 2020, President Macron rallied the French people with the declaration: "*Nous sommes en guerre. Toute l'action du Gouvernement et du Parlement doit être désormais tournée vers le combat contre l'épidémie*" (We are at war. All the action of the Government and Parliament must now be turned towards the fight against the epidemic.), (Adresse aux Français, 16 mars 2020). Yet, as Eric Macé also points out, if we look at humanity in the context of the historical transformation of the planet, it is humanity that has acted like a malignant virus on this planet.

Still, by changing the historical perspective, humanity can move from the violence, exploitation and exclusion of modernity to the possibility of a society of care, solidarity and inclusion.

3. Resonance

The various responses from the authors described above, without exception, argue for this care, solidarity and inclusion.

Two French sociologists, Eric Macé (*The Anthropocene Turning Point: A New Historicity of Social Relations*) and Thomas Brisson (*The 'World After': On the Pandemic and the Anthropocene*) examine the transformation of modern society in the context of global change and the Anthropocene. They propose a vision where, by viewing our time as the Anthropocene, the values of humankind can take on a global historicity and become the new framework for analyzing contemporary social relations.

Christopher Elson (*In the Covid: Some Reflections for Our Resonant Situation*), based in Canada, situates the Covid-19 emergency relative to a more general sense of crisis in the early twenty-first century. Considering the language and figures of confinement and deconfinement with curiosity he argues for the importance of cultural activism in relation to the social isolation and lockdowns imposed by

Covid-19. As he quotes from De Souza, “No culture can be built on a mandate to isolate”. Similarly, in the context of the isolation of social lockdown, Joan Roxin (What Lessons from this Planet-Wide Philosophical Experience?), specialist in visual media technology in France, expresses:

Confinement and the pandemic have awakened our consciences and reminded us that the time of misfortune is not over, that history is not over, and that we are all in the same boat. In order to meet the challenges on a planetary scale, reason, science and humanism are indispensable.

The social distancing and lockdowns imposed by the pandemic forced people to isolate themselves each from the other. Contact with others could result in contracting the untreatable virus, as ‘others’ were potential carriers of the novel coronavirus. Fear of others who may be carriers, and fear of uncontrolled infection divided society. The French philosopher Thierry Martin (*The 2020 Pandemic: Fear of Others, Fear for Others; Uncertainty and Dogmatism*) observed the gradual disappearance from civil life of consideration for others, of collective action for the common good and harmony with the natural environment. But this is what pandemics are all about as this is the prescription that saves people from a pandemic situation. The Italian philosopher Elena Bovo (*Lockdowns and Virtual Crowds: Medical Rationality and Collective Panic*) examines the behaviours of people in social lockdown and isolation. She finds that even in isolation we, in this instance united by fear in the face of an unprecedented threat relentlessly relayed by the media, came together to form a crowd, albeit a virtual crowd. Furthermore, this virtual crowd was governed by certain behaviours specific to physical crowds. She concludes by asking whether the new habits we adopted, were triggered by a perception of imminent danger, or by our instinct of imitation, or again by obedience to a higher instance?

Segregation through social lockdown and distancing also amplifies an individual’s feelings of alienation. Psychoanalyst Irina Chongarova-Aron (*Reflections on Personal Experiences of Migration During the Current Pandemic in the Context of Psychotherapeutic Communication*), reporting on the case of a well-educated young woman from South America working in London, describes an amplified mental instability in an unstable situation brought about by social isolation. She looks at

the dynamics of psychotherapeutic work in the context of the current pandemic as an experience of individual and collective grief.

Social lockdown is a strategy for the containment of infectious diseases. It is not achieved by the will of the people but is enforced by the state or local communities. It is tantamount to martial law to protect oneself from an enemy. A social lockdown is a control by power which deprives people of their freedom, prohibits solidarity and promotes inequality. Its symbolic expression is social distance and defensive behaviour. The linguist Daniel Lebaud (From *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* to the Vocabulary of the Covid-19 Pandemic) analyses how the words adopted by the President of France to rally the French people against the pandemic, *confinement, distance social, gestes barrières*, are incompatible with the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of the French Republic.

Solidarity between the global community, nations, regions and individuals is essential to prevent an explosion of Covid-19 infections. This is the analysis of the Slovenian cultural anthropologist Rajko Muršič (Pandemic in a Globalised World: Slovenian Perspectives). However, he continues by asking if the global community is functioning as it should? And what about at the national level? The more militarised a nation is, the more successful it is in containing the virus. But extreme militarisation is not what people want. People want solidarity. They want live music, concerts, theatre, time together, time of empathy. But Covid-19 does not allow for solidarity. In these difficult times, Rajko Muršič asks for much more co-operation, solidarity and mutual trust in this world. Similarly, the Slovenian sociologist Aleš Bučar Ručman (What Does the (In)ability to React to the Covid-19 Coronavirus Reveal About Our Societies?) observes that the EU is a zone which shares the values of capitalist economy and freedom, but at a time when Italy's health system was on the verge of collapse due to an explosion of infections, none of the EU countries came to Italy's aid. Instead, the EU countries sealed their own borders, exposing the fragility of their capitalist system

The strict urban and border controls caused by the Covid-19 pandemic created a situation of alienation. Japan, with its declining birth rate and ageing population, promotes a policy of actively accepting foreign migrants. However, in the context where the pandemic is far from over, very strict restrictions are imposed on the entry of foreigners, even for long-term legal residents. In fact, there is a virtual ban on

(re)entering the country for non-Japanese passport holders. Through the analysis of various cases, Slovenian Japanologist Andrej Bekeš (*Dissonance: Coexistence with Foreigners vs. Coronavirus Epidemic Countermeasures in Japan*) shows the underlying problems of human rights consciousness and ‘coexistence’ with others in Japanese society. Further, John Eade (*The 2020 Pandemic and Cities: London as a Case Study*), a British sociologist of religion, observes that throughout history, when a pandemic strikes, the poorest and most vulnerable are left to face desperate hardship, while the daily lives of the richest remain largely unchanged.

Alienation also applies to university campuses. Students are not allowed on university premises. Instead of face-to-face, classes are held online. Online classes have become common in schools all over the world.

From an observation of the consequences of university lockdowns, Luka Culiberg (*Quo Vadis, University?*), a Slovenian sociolinguist, proposes a radical overhaul of the humanities curriculum in higher education. There is a need for online courses that not only provide equal opportunities for education and equitable distribution of knowledge, but also enable independent initiatives for the creation of new values. The Slovenian linguist Vesna Požgaj Hadži (*The Impact of Covid-19: From a Culture of Teaching Towards a Culture of Learning*) similarly points out the importance of developing online education. The aim is to move beyond traditional education where knowledge is imparted, to an education where students seek, discover and learn for themselves. In a concrete initiative, the Chilean group for mathematics education of Raimundo Olfos and Estrella Soledad, in collaboration with Professor Masami Isoda of Tsukuba University, (*A Chilean Educational Initiative to Mitigate the Impact on Mathematics Learning in Grade 1 Students During the Covid-19 Lockdown*), developed a method for online teaching of primary-level mathematics in Chile. Giorgio Marinoni & Hilligje van’t Land (*Consequences of COVID-19 on Future Society: Some Reflections from the Higher Education Sector*) provide an overview of the situation in higher education worldwide, they discuss that:

The world will de-globalise, not because mobility will become more complex, but because we have decided to narrow our horizons and close

ourselves off. The world will become more unequal not because it is meant to be, but because we do not act to make it more equal.

Higher education, especially universities, is the place where knowledge is formed and transmitted. Knowledge is what distinguishes mankind from all the other species in the world. It is the creation of new knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge to future generations that has allowed human civilisation to continue to develop.

In a sense, the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent opportunity to rethink the functioning of higher education and to move away from a deteriorating anthropocentrism towards a more humane and holistic approach that does not neglect the relationship between man and nature.

This is a rather long quote, but the importance of co-operation and solidarity cannot be over-emphasised. This is not only true in education. International political scientist Joji Kijima (*Another Time of Renewal: Pandemics, Power, and Knowledge*) points out that the novel coronavirus is indiscriminately challenging humanity across borders, national authorities and the world order. And the limits of the international community's inter-sovereign organization which indiscriminately discriminates between sovereign states, are being exposed in the face of an indiscriminate global pandemic. In order to overcome the current pandemic crisis, it is hoped that a new 'epistemological community' will emerge, transcending existing disciplines, through problem finding. Without cooperation and solidarity, such a community cannot be built.

Finally, let us listen to the voice of Salah Hannachi, former Tunisian Ambassador Plenipotentiary to Japan and Australia (*Lessons from COVID-19: Human Solidarity a Third Pillar for TICAD*). In July 2020, the Japanese government officially announced that the 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8) will be held in Tunisia in 2022. At the heart of that conference is a proposal to introduce 'human solidarity', which Hannachi argues is a key value for international relations. The suggestion that the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic can be translated into solidarity between Asia and Africa is nothing short of resonance.

To conclude, we believe this movement of resonance should not be ‘confined’ to the present collection of eighteen reflections. We hope this special issue has created a forum for you, our readers, and that the movement will continue to amplify as you in turn give voice to your perceptions, your reflections on the current upheavals sweeping the world.

We look forward to receiving your comments.

Please send your papers to the Editors at: [interfaculty\[at\]hass.tsukuba.ac.jp](mailto:interfaculty[at]hass.tsukuba.ac.jp)



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