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CATASTROPHE STRIKES: COVID-19 THROUGH THE LENS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Lumpenization and Restructuring Economies	4
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Metro Market Employees: Shorewood, WI (Micaela Gaynor)</i>	5
<i>Latinx Migrants: Timonium, MD (Daniel Krugman)</i>	8
<i>Sex Work: U.S.A and Thailand (Katie van der Merwe)</i>	11
<i>Conclusion</i>	14
Chapter 2: Renegotiating Solidarity in Crisis	15
<i>Introduction</i>	15
<i>Some Thoughts on Solidarity, Individualism, and World-Making in the Age of Coronavirus (Spencer Ross Feinstein)</i>	15
<i>Social Media as a Lens to Observe and Analyze Solidarity: The Relationship Between Mechanical and Organic Solidarity during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Suria Vanrajah)</i>	18
<i>Symbols of Solidarity as Resistance and Self-preserving Exclusion in a Rural Vermont Town (Haegan O'Rourke)</i>	22
Chapter 3: Agency and Power under Lockdown	26
<i>Introduction</i>	26
<i>A Lesson on Empathy in the Time of Coronavirus (Maddie Lyons)</i>	26
<i>Agency and Power in the Lockdown Protests (Lauren Eskra)</i>	29
<i>Racial Bias in Police Action During Covid-19: Biopower, Power-agency, and Habitus (Madeleine Joinnides)</i>	31
<i>"Common Sense" Thinking When Things Head South (Bochu Ding)</i>	34
Conclusion	38
Works Cited	39



Introduction

Education in the Time of Covid-19

This is a project put together by the class of ANTH 306, Topics in Anthropological Theory, in Spring of 2020 during the global pandemic of the coronavirus. As schools and businesses shut down, basically bringing all aspects of normal life to a stop, we found ourselves navigating online learning, Zoom discussions, and attempting to find the value that comes with a traditional in-person learning. Amidst this, we began to find and apply theory to the events happening around us, doing “fieldwork” in our everyday lives. This prompted us to form a final project that uses various theoretical approaches to analyze responses to and results of the pandemic and explore how a global crisis exposes existing social structure and initiates new forms of culture and meaning. As a class, we were able to take our education into our own hands with the support of our professor, Mike Sheridan, and to individualize our final product. Each of us chose a case study that has personal significance to analyze from a specific framework. This allowed us to share our individual experiences, concerns, and ideas about how our society reacts to a global pandemic and to explore the implications of these dynamics on the future.

Remote Comparative Ethnography

Due to Middlebury College campus closure and amid isolation measures taken to slow the contagion rate of Covid-19, conducting fieldwork as a team limited our ability to interact in-person and forced us to adopt new ways to achieving similar ends. Using digital ethnography methodology, alongside our previous background in using video tools or internet research, our own experiences of instability and displacement prompted us to examine how working collaboratively and remotely could allow us to create a working body of comparative data amid an international health crisis that had both heightened individual vulnerability and exposed the intricacies and complexities of societal structure and organization. As we were no longer on the Middlebury College campus and therefore no longer able to share classroom spaces or field sites, we relied on synchronous video-calling and writing to organize, discuss, and analyze our field notes and ethnographic writing. Each individual chose a different field site to observe and consider how the anthropological theories we had been studying during Topics in Anthropological Theory could be applied to this era of the Covid-19 crisis. We synthesized our

work under three broad categories of anthropological theory: “lumpenization and economic structures,” “renegotiating solidarity in crisis,” and “agency and empathy.”

Towards an Anthropological Theory of Here and Now

As Eric Wolf once said, “the arrangements of a society become most visible when they are challenged by crisis,” (Wolf 2019: 562). Inspired by his words, and the cultural chaos we all have been witnessing amidst this pandemic, we organized our respective fieldwork into three groups and began to apply some of the theories we have learned over the semester. The result is the three chapters that follow, each combining the case studies and theoretical perspectives of different students, in an attempt to bring some kind of meaning to the situation at large. Our work begins with Chapter 1, which focuses on the division of society into groups deemed “essential” and “nonessential.” Through Marx’s concept of *lumpenproletariat* and the modern use of “lumpen” conceptualized by Philippe Bourgois, this chapter will denaturalize and complicate these new labor force categorizations through three case studies. Subsequently, Chapter 2 utilizes Durkheim’s lens of solidarity to approach sociocultural changes during the pandemic as they present themselves on three different levels: a more abstract, sociological analysis, through the lens of social media, and a small town in Vermont. Lastly, applying theory from Bourdieu, Ortner, Foucault, and Wolf, Chapter 3 analyzes the American perceptions of agency and freedom. Through interviews with a Middlebury College student and an anti-self-isolationist as well as theoretical analysis of significant current events, this chapter examines the roles which economic status, personal setting, and race affect individuals’ agency during the Covid-19 pandemic. In sum, this paper aims to bring a greater sense of meaning to our current situation from an anthropological perspective, drawing upon diverse accounts of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic as critically examined through the lenses of the different theorists we have encountered this semester.



Chapter 1: Lumpenization and Restructuring Economies

Introduction

While Covid-19 is first and foremost a global health crisis, the disasters resulting from the upheaval of capitalist life and the sudden halt of neoliberal expansion follow close behind in both the United States and around the world. In the largest and most sudden reconfiguration of the labor force since World War II, the labels defining workers, social roles of different types of laborers, and the relationships actors have with the means of production have shifted to extreme proportions, resulting in an unrecognizable and complex system of resource allocation and social structure. As nation-states and local governments issued stay-at-home orders between January and March, the labor force became divided into “essential” workers, those needed to continue to work in public or communal spaces to maintain the structures of society, and “non-essential” workers, those with the privilege and ability to work from home or are no longer needed for the reproduction of the capitalist machine. These categorizations are clearly important for understanding the everyday experiences of actors in social structures in the time Covid-19 as they have become the chief labels for workers, but the experience of the upper middle class “non-essential” CEO will be significantly different than the “non-essential” laid-off waiter who is currently surviving on the government stimulus package. How far can the division of the labor force into “essential” and “non-essential” truly define the experience of individuals in these classifications? In order to fully see the grey areas in between “essential” and “non-essential” and the diversity of situations inside those two classifications, more nuanced frameworks are needed.

In this chapter, we will explore three different case studies that embody the complexity and chaos of the reorganization of labor into “essential” and “non-essential.” Our goal is not to muse on the total impacts of this reorganization or create an entirely new system for categorizing the workforce during state and socially mandated lockdown, but rather it is to show the experiences, renegotiated strategies, and new violences cast upon people as a result of their altered relationship to the capitalist system. Specifically, through narratives and our subjective observations of grocery store workers in Shorewood, Wisconsin, LatinX migrants outside of Baltimore, Maryland, and sex workers across the U.S., Japan and South Asia, we show how government and societal response has “lumpenized” these groups, casting them outside of the global capitalist system and its resources. We argue that this exclusion, or, in the case of sex workers in certain parts of Asia, inclusion, has not only made these groups more vulnerable to the novel coronavirus, but is also a harsh display of the violences of “governmentality” and the emergency structures of powerful actors. Finally, we aim to show how

“lumpenization” is not an end to world-making, social reproduction, or cultural expression for these groups, but rather is a process within which resistance, social solidarity, and meaning creation in the time of Covid-19 can begin.

Karl Marx’s concept of the *lumpenproletariat* is crucial to our analysis of the distribution of resources during this time. Defined by McGee and Warms as a group of “ruined and adventurous offshoots” and the “disinherited dregs of society” who are cut off from resources and the means of production (2020:666), the “lumpen” are people or groups of people who are at the edges of the capitalist system. While Marx’s understanding of how labor creates meaning for workers and the idea of what “lumpen” is in a society sets a basis for this chapter, our work draws heavily from the contemporary use of “lumpenization” developed by Philippe Bourgois. In Bourgois’ outline, “*lumpen*, consequently, is best understood as an adjective or modifier rather than a bounded class category,” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:19). Here, rather than being a static and bounded unit, “lumpen” is now a fluid and dynamic process. Channeling the works of both Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, Bourgois then shows that different people in a “lumpenized” group have varying degrees of agency to negotiate with the broader capitalist system and the informal economies they create for survival (Bourgois 2019), and also that “lumpenized” groups overall interact with the structural powers that lumpenize them. Not only does this often produce everyday “symbolic violences,” but also the production and reproduction of cultural components at the margins of the neoliberal capitalist governmentality (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:17-19).

Due to the systemic responses by structural powers to this global pandemic, certain cultural groups and social categories face lumpenization as their access to resources in the system has been restricted. Like in Bourgois’ definition, the “lumpen” modification of a group is in constant motion as actors in newly “lumpen” groups, and entire “lumpen” groups themselves, with differing degrees of agency negotiate this new situation. We now turn towards case studies of groups in both our localities and across the globe. Through these snapshots and brief ethnographic analyses, our analysis challenges the norms established by the categorizations of “essential” and “non-essential” as structural violence and governmentality crosscuts these definitions at the margins of the Covid-19 world.

Metro Market Employees: Shorewood, WI

Micaela Gaynor

A dichotomous set of identities has emerged out of the Covid-19 crisis: “essential” and “non-essential” workers. But while the label “essential” may allude to the vital role that grocery store employees play in maintaining our society, these laborers continue to be marginalized by a structurally violent socioeconomic system and are subjected to a higher likelihood of contracting the virus. Despite the importance of the daily and now dangerous work that these essential employees are doing to sustain millions of Americans and limit the disruption of “normal life,” their lumpenization demonstrates the reproduction of politically and economically structured suffering and the limited agency of individuals. When applied to the plight of essential

workers, a Marxist approach to structure, complemented by Foucault's notion of power and Bourgeois' theory of lumpen abuse, allows us to better understand the disproportionately harmful and socially constructed impact of Covid-19 on the essential worker population. An international health pandemic has put our society in a state of *anomie* which exposes the exploitative relationship between lumpenized essential workers and the capitalistic structure that only symbolically recognizes their significance in our socioeconomic system. The effects of this lumpenization amid Covid-19 are specific to particular communities and work spaces, like grocery store employees in Shorewood, Wisconsin, but the overall process of redefined labor relations is indeed similar to the countrywide spread of the virus. The disempowerment of essential workers is also a national tragedy.

What must first be taken into account when considering how the essential worker population is being "lumpenized" is their class status. In a society that highly values individualism but greatly favors the sociopolitically and economically privileged, many assume that the individual is wholly responsible for choosing to take on an essential worker position, and therefore, they are responsible for the consequences — however, this fails to recognize the larger, coercive, structurally imposed limitations that act upon disenfranchised individuals (Bourgeois and Schonberg 2009:20). Metro Market, a grocery store located in Shorewood, WI, provides lower-priced goods to a wide array of customers, ranging from households that live below the poverty line to families that represent the nation's "one-percent." The employees themselves generally make minimum wage and most graduated from high school or completed their GED, but did not attend college. While many in the Shorewood neighborhood rely on Metro Market for their groceries, many are also outspoken in their opposition to minimum wage increases. Nontechnical positions or jobs that do not require educational credentials or certifications mean a larger pool of eligible hires, which generates an economic and political power imbalance between the employer, the employee, and often the consumer. Covid-19 exacerbates this. Across the United States, essential employees earn an average of 18.2% less than employees in other industries (McQuarrie 2020). But despite the fact that especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, essential workers are put at far greater risk than other employed populations, the low wages of Metro Market employees are often rationalized as being a consequence of the essential worker's choices that prevented them from developing the skills or achieving the credentials or certifications necessary to obtain a high-paying job. In this way, the lumpen abuse cycle is reproduced and strengthened by a collective historical and sociocultural framework that holds essential workers are being responsible for actions taken under forced and structurally imposed constraints.

Because some do recognize the increased danger of being an essential worker during a public health emergency, many in Shorewood are calling essential workers the "heroes" of the Covid-19 crisis. But contrary to what the title suggests, essential workers are not being treated as heroes of society so much as they are being treated as a community of laborers whose economically productive labor is essential to maintaining a capitalistic society. In this way, what "essential worker" really means is "essential work." Essential work is widely understood "as work deemed necessary to meet basic needs of human survival and well-being — food, health, safety

and cleaning” (Jaggers 2020). Yet many of the so-called essential workers performing these tasks, like the Metro Market employees, have experienced insufficient safety supplies (such as masks and gloves), inadequate safety measures, and lack of risk compensation. As a result of twentieth century neoliberalism, low-wage workers in nontechnical positions were already faced with a political and economic disadvantage, becoming a lumpenized population that was “produced at the interstices of transitioning modes of production” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:18). While many Shorewood lawn signs and public art displays thank food workers and refer to essential workers as “heroes,” similar to many other communities across the United States, the Covid-19 pandemic has not effectively changed their low economic and political status. None of the several Congressional proposals to offer hazard pay to essential workers have come close to becoming law, and most essential employees have not received a pay increase while unemployment rates continue to rise (Pramuk 2020). I would argue that this federal spending hesitancy is connected to the lumpenization of the Covid-19 “heroes,” and how through a neoliberal lens, the individuals are less “essential” than they are “expendable.” In a capitalistic framework, the humanity and sensibilities of the individuals themselves are less valuable to the capitalistic structure than the productive labor they provide.

It is because of this power imbalance and marginalization that many essential workers feel as though they are only “essential” for maintaining the economic base, and they are “sacrificial” workers in order to maintain the capitalistic structure that drives social organization and policy (Lowrey 2020). The lumpenization of essential workers has also disproportionately led to the “sacrificing” of particular communities: women and people of color. At Metro Market, the vast majority of on-the-floor employees are African-American and/or women. These disenfranchised workers face obstacles of educational discrimination, occupational segregation, hiring prejudice, and fewer labor protections; these simultaneously limit their political and economic power and make it more difficult to protest potentially life-threatening working conditions (Lowrey 2020). The unbalanced oppression of these minority groups is often overlooked as a result of symbolic violence. The economic and political factors often controlling social organization is not always “[being] wielded overtly, but rather [it] ‘flows’ through the very foundations of what we recognize as reason [and] civilization” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:18). At risk of unemployment or financial insecurity, and with little political power to affect change, there is little room for resistance, and moreover, hegemonic neoliberal societal structures persuade individuals to accept “their politically and institutionally imposed vulnerability and embodied suffering” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:306). Like in the case of Metro Market employees, the category of essential workers is largely comprised of marginalized and minority groups whose agency in doing essential work may be limited by historical and sociocultural power imbalances across gender and ethnicity.

Latinx Migrants: Timonium, MD

Daniel Krugman

A cop in a bulletproof vest motioned me to keep driving towards the front gate past the rows of parked cars. It was nine in the morning on Mother's Day and three parking lots of people waiting to receive food handouts were already full. Distribution would not begin for another two hours. The previous Sunday, volunteers had handed out pre-packaged boxes of foodstuffs for a week to 698 cars and worked until well after five. This week, Amigos, a Baltimore County non-profit that aims to make "all Latino residents of Baltimore County fully informed, empowered, and integrated citizens of the community," moved their food distribution operation from a local church in a migrant-dense area to the Maryland State Fairgrounds a few miles away for more space to meet the demand of the community.

After being let in through the main gate by another Baltimore County officer, the quiet of the parking lot was overtaken by the chaos and bustle of the makeshift distribution center. A DJ from Pachanga Radio played Latin beats as volunteers, mostly members of the Latinx community, scrambled to move thousands of boxes containing leftover fruits, vegetables, and microwavable meals out of a massive concrete room sometimes used to hold horses. Usually in early May, the auction auditorium and adjacent stalls owned by the Fasig-Tipton Company, a premier racehorse auctioneer, would be in peak season selling thoroughbred racers and retired studs. In the time of Covid-19, the place where horses are sold for far more than the migrant workers make in a year is now the space where those workers hope to receive enough to eat for a week.

Just before the gates were opened, the volunteers ate as a Mariachi man in full attire sang *Cielito Lindo* over the speakers for the lines of cars. A chicken dish from a Dominican mother, *pupusas* prepared by an El Salvadorian family, cake pops donated by another non-profit, and a massive bag of McChicken sandwiches bought from down the road were all passed around. While an older couple danced and smiled to the classic song and many conversed and briefly rested before they would serve their friends and family, one of the organizers broke down crying. Not only were they short staffed, as many volunteers had not come because of burnout and Mother's Day, but she had learned that the number of families receiving would be significantly more than the previous weekend and they would not have enough to feed them all.

Like the other groups highlighted in this chapter, migrant Latinx workers existed in already marginalized spaces in the capitalist American economy before Covid-19. As Bourgios summarized for Nuyoricans workers' history of abrupt and severe changes to their modes of production, "the historical structural transformations imposed upon the Puerto Rican *jíbaro* [hillbilly] translates statistically into a tragic profile of unemployment, substance abuse, broken families, and devastated health in U.S. inner cities" (2019: 662). Hispanic migrant workers, both in *El Barro* in Harlem and spread across the outskirts of Baltimore, enter the United States' neoliberal economy at the very bottom with a *habitus*, or "common sense" in Bourgeois' outline (2019: 663), that does not allow for the easy transfers of economic, social, and cultural capital needed for upward mobility. Thus, because of the often malleable and loosely constructed U.S.

immigration system and the structural racism of the U.S. economy they are entering, Latinx migrants teeter between statuses. They are both “lumpen,” meaning that they are fully closed off from the economy and subject to survival in the informal economy like Nuyorican crack dealers (Bourgois 2019), and also the “working poor” in labor-intensive positions inside of the formal economy that allows for livelihood, survival, and often the transfer of economic capital back to the Latin American nations these workers come from (Holmes 2013).

When Governor Larry Hogan issued a state-wide stay-at-home order on March 30th, and even before the official close of the state when social pressure and self-quarantining closed many private businesses, many of the Hispanic migrant workers living in Baltimore County suburbs hovering around the edge of “lumpen” lost the jobs that had kept them in the economy and away from “lumpen” subjectivity. While over 370,000 unemployed Marylanders have received unemployment benefits from the state, where almost one in five are currently unemployed (*Baltimore Sun* 2020), and many are beginning to receive CARES act stimulus checks of \$1,200, these protections do not apply to the entire migrant community. Alongside the U.S. immigration system’s creation of ambiguity and different legalities for Latinx migrant workers, Maryland’s unemployment benefit system and the CARES Act does not cover the entire spectrum of immigrant statuses (National Employment Law Project 2020). Because the state has closed businesses and cut many migrant workers off from the means of production and excluded them from state social services, a huge number in the Latinx community in Baltimore County are now “lumpenized” with their largest source of subsistence and economic activity occurring in informal economies.

Without formal support and access to employment, the now “lumpenized” Latinx community has been forced to negotiate an economic crisis during a global pandemic. Like other communities around the nation, this crisis has been expressed in food scarcity. Rather than through the Maryland state relief programs cannot access, the needs of the community have been met through existing voluntaristic structures centered around non-profits and integration programs such as Amigos and networks of kinship and social exchange. According to an Amigos Facebook post, in six food drives sponsored by another Baltimore non-profit called 4MyCiTy (an organization that redirects restaurant and grocery food to at-risk groups), in April 2020 6,862 families received enough food to last one to two weeks.

However, as seen at the pop-up distribution center at the Maryland State Fairgrounds where recipients were met by Mariachi and volunteers danced together while exchanging homemade meals, “lumpenization” in the time of Covid-19 is not exclusively defined by suffering state-sanctioned abuse. Rather, it is also an opportunity for Latinx migrants to express alternate economies and solidarities as the state and the white-middle-class hegemony of suburban Baltimore County neglects them in a newly created space. The line of cars would often stall as a volunteer and a recipient yelled through their car windows, greeting each other in Spanish. El Salvadorians, Hondurans, Dominicans, and Mexicans all worked the supply lines together, chatting while distributing the boxes. Two Pachanga Radio hosts provided Spanish commentary on the entire event over the loudspeakers, providing information about the stay-at-home orders, what to do at home, and other resources for immigrant health. The Mother’s Day food

distribution was not just an informal way to provide economic subsistence for the Latinx community in Baltimore, but also was a place for them to exchange and transform social capital between each other in a larger society that they could not.

Through Antonio Gramsci's approach to the cultural aspects of class inequality, it can be seen that "the oppressed develop new notions of morality and leadership, as well as new alliances that redefine the cultural worlds in which they live" when excluded from the greater means of production (McGee and Warms 2020:674). When a recipient comes to receive food or a volunteer gives their time to distribute to their community through Amigos, they are not simply receiving the economic capital needed to survive. In this action, in this newly constructed space (the horse showroom), they also freely exchanged and transformed social and cultural capital between each other, strengthening and growing trust in their transnational and deterritorialized solidarity. In "lumpenization," the Greater Baltimore Latinx community is both subjected to the structural violence of state and social neglect, but also has been given the opportunity to express aspects of culturally specific habituses, ideologies, and strategies through the new prevalence and power of informal systems that are currently feeding many of them.

While each of the 1,206 families that came to Amigos' Mother's Day distribution ended up receiving food, the organizer's concerns highlight the growing anxieties of continued "lumpenization" in a locked down economy. With the reopening of Baltimore County and Maryland scheduled to be a slow "phased" process, volunteers becoming increasingly tired of the long days of distribution, 4MyCiTy's supply chain changing as restaurants and grocers reopen and donate less, and the ongoing risk of Covid-19, the informal economy that these families in the Latinx community rely on is as fragile as ever. In this informal economy, if one part collapses or becomes overwhelmed, the entire system feeding thousands of migrant families falls.

The prolonging of stay-at-home orders and separation from the formal capitalist economy mean the continuation of "lumpenization" and reliance on this and other unstable informal economies for Latinx community members in Baltimore County. There is no exact date when these families will be "de-lumpenized" and return to survival in the formal economy as "working poor" or "lower middle class," nor is there certainty that the jobs that allowed them into the formal economy will exist once stay-at-home orders are lifted. However, as understood through Anthony Giddens' concept of "structuration" (McGee and Warms 2019:682) in which agents, such as Latinx migrant workers, produce and reproduce structures, like Amigos, transnational sociality, informal economies, and the Latinx migrant solidarity itself, the migrant workers' time in "lumpenization" during the Covid-19 pandemic does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, these experiences—hunger and structural violence, food distribution and the makeshift spaces of solidarity alike—allows for both the reproduction of marginalization and the embodiment the Hispanic migrant worker habitus, but also the creation of new ideas of what the solidarity of the Latinx community could look like in Baltimore, resistances to the structures that have "lumpenized" them, and the formation of meanings and worldviews that will not simply disappear in a "post-coronavirus" era.

Sex Work: U.S.A and Thailand

Katie van der Merwe

Sex work and more specifically prostitution is a highly stigmatized profession, regularly causing those who practice it to be excluded from social, political, and economic aspects of society. In the U.S., sex work falls under state laws rather than federal law and is illegal in all states except for Nevada. The status of such work has initiated an ongoing debate over decriminalization with one side arguing that the industry exploits individuals and preys on the weak and the other arguing that decriminalizing it would protect workers and increase public health (Garsd 2019). The criminalization of sex work, however, does little to limit the industry other than create the constant fear of arrest in the workers' minds. As of 2015, security services estimates, public health program reports, and other data from global criminal justice programs estimated that there is an average of 1 million prostitutes in the United States (Havocscope 2015). In a study done in 2014 on 8 major cities in the U.S., it was found that the underground commercial sex economy is significant, with sex work bringing in \$290 million per year in Atlanta.

Although this shows the movements of large sums of money across the country, this industry is operating illegally and therefore outside of the formalized economy. This allows us to categorize sex workers in the U.S. as a lumpenized group, or one that accepts a lower position in a society due to the structural limitations on individual agency (McGee and Warms 2019: 664). Ashley Madness, the political actions director and secretary for the Los Angeles chapter of the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP LA) and a worker herself, stated that "a lot of [sex workers] have been on the margins of the economy for a very, very long time, if not [their] entire lives" and that "some [sex workers] have literally not taken a payment except in cash or on a cash app. Some sex workers have never had bank accounts. Some are undocumented" (Herrera 2020). This criminalization of sex work and the resulting exclusion of the labor force from the formalized economy results in the group being lumpenized.

As the coronavirus spread into a global pandemic and entered the U.S., shutting down the country in all areas except essential businesses and personnel, the normal version of sex work came to a halt. Because most sex work involves in-person contact, their day-to-day work has suddenly become a health risk to both themselves and their clients. In addition, because sex workers are commonly stereotyped to be diseased, the epidemic only cements this idea and makes their work deemed even lower than non-essential. This means that sex workers either must stop work or move to a virtual mode. Virtual services not only bring in less income but are also not accessible to those sex workers who do not have internet access or do not have a private area separate from their family to do such work. In addition, many of the workers do not have an account in which they can be paid for virtual services with non-cash payments (Hurst 2020). This leaves a significant number of individuals in a predicament of a highly reduced or halted income. For individuals facing similar situations of unemployment, this is the time to file for unemployment insurance, as millions in the U.S. have already done, but for sex workers who do not have pay stubs or 1099 forms, they are ineligible (Herrera 2020). In addition, although

the government has passed a congressional relief package, it will not offer many sex workers the relief of direct cash payments due to their lack of tax returns. Other aid programs such as the Small Business Administration federal aid package specifically excludes those who engage in "live performances of a prurient sexual nature," making it additionally inaccessible to sex workers (Herrera 2020).

A similar exclusion of sex workers from aid packages is occurring in France. Although sex workers in France are classified as freelancers, they are not eligible for the €1,500 offered by the government to workers (Hurst, et al. 2020). In light of this, the *Fédération Parapluie Rouge* (Red Umbrella Federation), which represents sex workers, asked the government to provide a replacement income while the shutdown continues "without any condition of regularity of stay" but the French Secretary of Equality, Marlène Schiappa, said "it is very complicated to compensate a person who carries out an undeclared activity such as prostitution" leaving this proposition on standby and the workers without income (Hurst, et al. 2020).

Other countries have attempted to include sex workers in aid packages in varying degrees. For example, Japan has initiated a stimulus package worth 108 trillion Japanese yen (USD \$989 billion) and has made sex workers eligible to apply under certain conditions (Yeung et al. 2020). But, with prostitution still being illegal in Japan (although some other forms of sex work are legal), the stigma surrounding the work makes individuals wary to apply for this aid and reveal their line of work. For others, the rules of eligibility are simply unclear and restrictive, meaning that many are unsure of their eligibility and some cannot provide proof of their salary and lost income, as the plan requires due to under-the-table payments and fluctuating salaries (Yeung et al. 2020). In Malaysia, although all sex work is illegal, there are available sources of aid such as a monthly allowance and temporary accommodation for homeless and/or unemployed people which can include sex workers (as long as they hide their profession). Lastly in Thailand, sex workers have been integrated most thoroughly and productively into the aid from the government despite sex work being criminalized. In the wake of the virus, sex workers are now explicitly considered eligible for unemployment benefits and assistant grants from the government (Yeung et al. 2020).

In response to their exclusion from aid packages in the U.S., American sex workers have developed an extensive network of mutual aid funds to offer emergency grants to struggling individuals within their industry. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Representative for New York's 14th Congressional District has encouraged communities to establish mutual aid projects to give resources to the vulnerable, a population which includes sex workers (Herrera 2020). Mutual aid has blossomed in the wake of the pandemic in which sex workers have organized funding and mutual support outside of the governmental response. This includes asking for donations from outside donors and internal support among members of the profession. Examples of initiatives are the Las Vegas Sex Worker Covid19 Emergency Relief Fund which raised \$10,000 in 15 days, the Emergency Covid Relief for Sex Workers in New York which has collected over \$100,000, and similar efforts raising thousands of dollars in Austin, Detroit, Seattle, and San Francisco (Herrera 2020). But, due to the limited amount of resources the mutual aid is bringing in, tough decisions are being made about who receives the aid. Organizers are looking at who

can partake in web-based-work, who is supporting children or other dependents, and also who is multiply marginalized such as disabled or undocumented people who cannot access other jobs. This leaves many people without deserved aid, but according to Fera Lorde, a sex worker and organizer with Brooklyn SWOP, this distribution strategy of mutual aid involving the prioritization of people who are multiply marginalized is historically normalized within sex workers, making it accepted among those effected (Herrera 2020).

The mutual aid network of sex workers in the U.S. operates as a sub-economic system of meaning that results from the group's lumpenization. Bourgois and Schonberg's book *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), about heroin users in San Francisco in the late 1990s and early 2000s, offers a case study of lumpenized people who are forced to operate in an informal economy based on gift giving and mutual aid. This "moral economy" involves users building a reputation or cultural capital in the community based on how likely they are to reciprocate a gift (of heroin) and these reputations of morality are the basis for a network of reciprocity and the sharing of heroin fixes (2009: 6). This is a system of meaning created by lumpenization that is similar to that being produced among sex workers across the U.S. today. As their position outside of the formal economy is cemented by their exclusion from the stimulus package, the lumpen status of sex workers is further formalized. Such a system of meaning also establishes a hierarchy of needs within the population. Those who are marginalized in multiple ways such as workers who are black, indigenous, undocumented, transgender, full-service sex workers, and/or disabled are given a higher status of need within this informal economy, therefore offering them a unique form of social capital based on their institutionalized subordination. U.S. sex workers are therefore showing how increased lumpenization produces a greater adoption of a system of mutual aid than has previously existed and as the network becomes more extensive, their "moral economy" and system of meaning becomes increasingly established.

Although sex workers such as those in the U.S. are being further lumpenized via their exclusion from crisis aid, other sex workers who are included are experiencing a reduction in their lumpen status. With the adoption of sex workers into aid packages, their work is being acknowledged and integrated into the formal economy, making their status as a lumpen ambiguous. In Thailand, responses to the explicit aid for sex workers gives hope to activists who campaign for protections, better working conditions, and reduced stigma surrounding the industry. Liz Hilton, a member of the Thai Empowerment Foundation stated that because sex workers are included in the package shows "an acceptance that the work we do is work" and she further claims that "if sex work can be recognized in a crisis, it has to be recognized outside of a crisis. There's no going back" (Yeung et al. 2020). This opens the door to a future of processual de-lumpenization.

Conclusion

When the common categorizations of "essential" and "non-essential" are intersected with Marxist understandings of "lumpenization" and the dynamics of "lumpen" populations in these case studies, three major themes emerged. First, and most significantly to analysis in the time

of Covid-19, we found that the lumpenization of a group of people is produced by a hegemonic system of power and coercion that forces people into the margins of society. In this lumpenization, it is important to note that membership and formation of a “lumpenized group” is dynamic and operates along a scale. Rather than a strict class category, “lumpen” is a subjective state and an experience of abuse and violence as people are removed from access to the formal means of production. Lastly, we found that entrance into a lumpenized group necessitates alternate systems of material exchange and meaning. This allows for individuals experiencing lumpen subjectivity to not only find agency within that system, but also outside of those normalized mechanisms within their omnipresent sociocultural framework. This is significant, especially while looking at groups during Covid-19, when crisis exposes social structure and structural inequalities come to the forefront. What crisis gives us, as faults in the structure become more visible and we can see that they are susceptible to change, is an opportunity – an ability to break down lumpenizing agents, divert us from a historical path of structural and symbolic violence, and pursue a process of change and delumpenization.



Chapter 2: Renegotiating Solidarity in Crisis

Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, our society is in constant flux, even in ways that we do not yet understand; this provides an avenue for new anthropological analysis. In particular, we are seeing a shift in expressions of solidarity in the United States on a grand scale and our individual communities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly as a result of social distancing protocols that isolate individuals in their homes. We have chosen to take Durkheim's lens of solidarity to approach these sociocultural changes as they present themselves on three different levels: a more abstract, sociological analysis, through the lens of social media, and a small town in Vermont. These different contexts provide unique perspectives on this shift in our society and allow for a personal, critical examination of this life-altering period in our lives.

Some Thoughts on Solidarity, Individualism, and World-Making in the Age of Coronavirus

Spencer Ross Feinstein

It's been almost 200 years since the late, great Émile Durkheim first started thinking about the structural integrity of society, about the bonds that hold us all together and keeps us all living together in relative peace and harmony. Yet today, in the midst of this chaotic world-historical pandemic, his ideas resonate more than ever. I'm sure many of us feel, as I do, that our world is kinda sorta' spinning out of control, that the sky is falling and nothing will ever be the same again. Thanks to Covid-19, we're all living through a mostly unprecedented and paradoxical moment in history; a time in which we're all meant to look after ourselves and stay as far apart from each other as possible for as long as possible, but this is also a time when most of us feel a new and powerful kind of solidarity with each other, like we're "in it together," working together to achieve a common goal. And indeed, as the science is telling us, if we are to defeat this superordinate so-called 'invisible enemy' then we must come together, but we must do so while apart – a paradox for the ages.

Some things, though, seem to have been made less confusing, by being brought into focus by the present crisis. Eric Wolf says that "the arrangements of a society become most visible when they are challenged by crisis," and I think he couldn't be more right, especially now (Wolf 2019: 562). With a helping hand from Durkheim and some fingers and toes from Ortner as well as a number of Jacobins, I contend that the Covid-19 pandemic has directly challenged the structural integrity of our society -- i.e. the hegemonic neoliberal late-capitalist arrangements

and/or structures of our society -- and has thus, following Wolf, visibilized said arrangements and/or structures anew. But this crisis has not just rendered visible said arrangements and/or structures; I further contend that the present crisis has also destabilized these arrangements and/or structures, thereby opening up a radically new world of radical world-making opportunities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made apparent the flawed basic logic of our society, one that “combines a material reality of intense interdependence with moral and political systems that leave people to look out for themselves” (Britton-Purdy 2020). We live in what Durkheim would call an “organic” society or a society held together by “organic solidarity” (Durkheim 1893: 85-6); that is, we live in a society structured around and/or predicated upon a division of labor. All the different kinds of labor that keep the machine of society click-clacking along are divided amongst most everyone in our society -- i.e. some are hunters, others are fishers or herders or critical critics, but none are all of the above -- and this means that each of us (heavily) relies on everyone else to do their part; the machine would break down if just a few cogs stopped spinning. Our present crisis has intensified this division; with most every category of employment deemed either “essential” or “non-essential,” we’ve all become acutely aware of which kinds of labor make the world go ‘round and which don’t, which goods and services we can and can’t do without, and this awareness has inspired in us, inter alia, a renewed appreciation of the vast network of social interconnections and interdependent labor relations that hold our world together (hence salutes to nurses and deliverymen and so on). In short, although we might assume that social distancing would threaten social solidarity, dealing with this pandemic has inspired in many of us a new sense of solidarity with our compatriots, our “neighbor” in the biblical sense of the word. However, this new sense of mass solidarity conflicts with long-lived and thoroughly entrenched structures in our society, viz. the aforementioned “moral and political systems that leave people to look out for themselves.”

The U.S. is clearly not a country with a particularly good history of national solidarity; in fact, many of our founding cultural schemas, i.e. our “key scenarios” and “root metaphors,” promote, and frequently promote to an extreme degree, the exact opposite of solidarity: individualism (Ortner 1973: 1340). Following Ortner, our cultural order of meaning privileges the Horatio Alger model and the bootstraps mythos, both symbolizing radical individualism, over collectivity, *communitas*, and/or solidarity. As Americans, we’re supposed to be self-sufficient and “independent,” not relying on others for help; we don’t want to pay taxes for things like universal health care and paid sick leave because we’re meant to be looking out for ourselves, not others, and we don’t want the government or any other authority infringing upon our “liberties” and “free markets” anyway. Clearly, this deep-seated ethos of individualism, a significant structuring force in American life, is diametrically opposed to this new sense of solidarity inspired by the present crisis, and this opposition is intensifying “anomie,” or social instability resulting from clashing norms, mores, and belief systems (Durkheim 1982: 130). These days, we see “anomie” manifested whenever we see someone buying too much toilet paper or not wearing a mask or not social distancing (etc...) and promptly getting indicted in the court of public opinion for it -- what was once largely acceptable individualistic behavior is now

transgressive of a new social order or a moral economy invoked by the pandemic. This intensification of anomie suggests an attendant transformation and strengthening of “collective consciousness,” what Durkheim called the internalized “social facts” that to some extent regulate behavior and impel/compel compliance with societal and/or cultural norms, mores, and other guiding forces (Durkheim 1893: 55-6). Not only are we feeling a stronger sense of solidarity with our fellow compatriots, but we’re also, en masse, collectively thinking and behaving differently because of it; we’re enforcing solidarity by enforcing a new solidarity-centric moral code, and we’re seeing solidarity win out over individualism. Now, to be clear, I don’t think all of this anomie is produced by the Covid pandemic; rather, the I think the pandemic is intensifying it and concomitantly making such conflicts between individual and group-interest easier to see and/or newly visibilized, consequently drawing critical attention to them, and it seems we’re generally pro-solidarity, at least in the short-run (Hayes 2020).

But what about the long-run? Once the Covid pandemic is over, will this rising tide of solidarity-based sociopolitics sink back into the sea or will it keep on climbing? We know that this pandemic has directly challenged the hegemonic arrangements and/or structures of our society, thereby rendering said arrangements and/or structures readily visible, and, as such, we know that dealing with this pandemic as well as its fallout will require dealing with deeper pathologies rooted in American society in addition to the Covid-19 pathogen (Vasudevan 2020). We also know, or rather are starting to become acutely aware of the reality that solidarity, not individualism, is the cure; on a micro-level, it’s solidarity that determines whether or not you hoard toilet paper, price-gouge sanitizer, or wear a mask, and on a macro-level it’s that same solidarity that determines whether or not your government provides things like universal basic income and universal health care and paid sick leave -- the kind of stuff we need not just to recover from our present crisis, but also to begin to treat that deeper pathology and rearrange and/or restructure our society in accordance with the moral dictates of that solidarity I think a lot of us are starting to feel (Klinenberg 2020). So, where does that leave us? I would like to think that there really is no going back, that Covid-19 has rendered sufficiently visible, palpable, and tangible the insufficiencies and instabilities of our society, a society predicated upon stoic neoliberal late-capitalist individualism and held together by the undervalued and underpaid labor of undervalued and underpaid individuals, that this budding solidarity-based sociopolitics will grow and branch out and eventually uproot the deeply embedded roots American individualism for good and for all. In some ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has given us a great opportunity to make real structural change, maybe challenged us to do so, and I sure hope we can rise to the challenge -- a brighter, healthier future depends on it.

Social Media as a Lens to Observe and Analyze Solidarity: The Relationship Between Mechanical and Organic Solidarity during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Suria Vanrajah

Given the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, our current lives are uniquely ripe for social analysis. With much of our social interaction taking place online due to social distancing orders, social media presents a perfect angle from which to observe and analyze changing sociocultural dynamics and realities. In this paper, I attempt to scratch the surface on this topic, narrowly focusing on social media use in the United States and how it is reflecting and reaffirming the presence of both mechanical solidarity *and* organic solidarity as theorized by Émile Durkheim. While Durkheim's analysis of these types of solidarity was focused on the social realities of his time, they can be adapted and shifted to apply to our current reality, exposing the possibility that mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity can function in tandem in this time of crisis. Beginning with a brief explanation as to the current use of social media during the pandemic and then shifting to a discussion of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, followed by a discussion of their intersection, this paper attempts to begin what will surely be a richer, more complex discussion about solidarity and its presentation online during what is shaping up to be a defining moment in global history.

Social Media and the Covid-19 Pandemic

While social media has been a major facet of our lives throughout the 21st century, the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed its role and use. For most of the world (particularly the United States), social media has become the main point of connection with the outside world as millions socially distance in their homes. Without work, school, and social activities, social media has presented itself as a manner to stay in touch with our networks during these unprecedented times. Be it photos of the baked goods made with newfound free time or fundraisers for food banks as thousands struggle to afford necessities, social media has been flooded with people attempting to make all sorts of connections in an increasingly isolated world. While social media has been an important form of connection throughout its advent, it has found a new life during a time where we have no other method to connect with the hundreds (if not thousands) of people who make up our lives. With this increased use during the pandemic, social media has come to reflect the cultural and social realities of our lives and presents a unique point of comparison and analysis for such issues.

A Newfound Presence of Mechanical Solidarity

In particular, social media (and particularly *how* it is being used) reflects and re-enforces the mechanical solidarity presenting itself during this unprecedented crisis. Mechanical solidarity, as explained by Émile Durkheim, is present in societies in which "all members have a common, shared social experience but who do not necessarily depend on each other to survive" (Moore 2019:v36). While Durkheim may have developed this theory of solidarity based on shared values, locales, and other experiences in a rather homogenous society, it could not be

more applicable to the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of who you are, where you live, etc., everyone in the United States has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in one way or another, particularly in having their lives changed by social distancing regulations. In being isolated, we as a nation are sharing in a unique social experience that will (hopefully) never occur again as our country attempts to survive a deadly pandemic. By looking at social media trends, one can more clearly understand the United States as exhibiting mechanical solidarity during this period.

With this new use of social media, a popular rhetoric has emerged: we're all in this together. This rhetoric encompasses both the collective experience of the pandemic as well as the need to support one another during this time. From governments enlisting the help of celebrities to encourage social distancing en masse for the greater good (Gentile 2020) to former classmates sharing recipes to keep their followers busy, individuals and organizations from all areas of life are using social media to reinforce the concept that all Americans are experiencing the pandemic *and* that we need to support one another. This emphasis on collective experience, be it explicit or implied, displays the communal nature of the experience of this pandemic. During a period that feels exceptionally isolating, one can turn to social media to see that their friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and more are experiencing the same feelings. In addition to using social media to display the collective experience of Covid-19, many also use it to emphasize the importance of community in persevering and overcoming the effects of the pandemic. From offering meals to those in need to paying tribute to healthcare workers, social media usage has placed an increased emphasis on coming together as a community (be it at the national, state, or local level) to weather this metaphorical storm. This emphasis of communal experience and reliance on community to make it through the pandemic is at the very essence of mechanical solidarity, even if it was not Durkheim's original intention. Covid-19 will mark a significant social experience in the lives of all those who endured it and will likely re-shape our society in ways that way cannot even know yet. Social media allows us to communicate this experience while we are all isolated in our own homes and serves as a reflection of the arguably unprecedented mechanical solidarity our country is experiencing.

While many use social media to (unconsciously) reflect the mechanical solidarity our country is experiencing, there is a subset of the population that has begun using it to (unconsciously) resist the mechanical solidarity being experienced. Posts have popped up across platforms criticizing government issued social distancing orders, comparing social distancing to slavery, and demanding that the country "re-open." While not their intention, these individuals are using social media as a way to resist the mechanical solidarity that they feel is infringing on their rights. In a country with an extreme emphasis on individualism, it should come as no surprise that there are portions of the population who do not want to be grouped into a social experience that limits their behaviors and changes their daily lives. These attempts to resist mechanical solidarity actually end up further reinforcing its presence: despite a desire to not be isolated and to return to life as normal, these individuals are still experiencing social distancing like the rest of us and still are having their lives shaped by Covid-19, even if they attempt to resist it. This use of social media to attempt to resist the mechanical solidarity present

in this country not only highlights how traditional American values are in contrast with our current situation, but also how we all experience the effects of Covid-19, whether or not we want to.

In contrast to those who attempt to resist this mechanical solidarity, social media has also shed light on those who critique the very possibility of mechanical solidarity being present during the Covid-19 pandemic. While not using anthropological terms such as mechanical solidarity in their critique, activists and their followers have been using social media to highlight that not all Americans experience Covid-19 the same way. With unemployment on the rise (Lewis and Hsu 2020), disproportionate numbers of minorities being arrested for violating social distancing orders (Southall 2020), a rise of racism and violence against Asian-Americans, and more inequities presenting themselves, social media posts have been highlighting how minorities and low-income individuals are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in ways that white, wealthy, and other privileged groups are not. This valid critique highlights that despite Covid-19 impacting all Americans, in a socially stratified society even a global pandemic will not impact all Americans *equally*. While this isn't to say that mechanical solidarity isn't at play, this activist-gearred social media trend presents the opportunity to acknowledge that mechanical solidarity is complex in any stratified society, particularly one as unequal and large as the United States, and that a shared social experience does not mean that it is *equally* shared by all. Such a critique of the public and widespread assertion of mechanical solidarity (particularly over social media) presents an opportunity for this country to engage in a serious conversation about major crises and how inequities in our society lead to certain groups being impacted more than others, but in the interest of paper length such a discussion must be saved for another time.

Organic Solidarity: A Continued (and Newly Heightened) Reality

A further argument for the uniqueness of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it is presenting organic solidarity in addition to mechanical solidarity, a presentation which is being highlighted using social media. Durkheim theorized organic solidarity to be present in societies in which "diverse, interdependent subdivisions are linked by formal institutions into a single society" (Moore 36: 2019). Durkheim would have likely identified the United States pre-pandemic (and most likely currently) as an organic solidarity society due to its heterogenous nature and many formalized (and informal) divisions that exist in order for the country to function properly. That being said, as was expounded upon prior to this section, the Covid-19 pandemic provides a unique situation in which *both* mechanical and organic solidarity have presented themselves in American society and social media, and therefore presents a perfect case study in which to observe them.

Social media has been reflecting the organic solidarity present in American society by highlighting the roles of specialized individuals and groups and how they contribute to the response to the pandemic. With fundraisers to send pizzas to doctors and nurses at hospitals hit hard by the pandemic to posts thanking all essential workers (from healthcare workers to grocery store employees), there has been a widespread trend on social media acknowledging and thanking essential workers for the roles they play during this pandemic. By specifically

highlighting this subsection of the population (essential workers), social media users are unconsciously reaffirming the organic solidarity continuously present in American society. The United States relies on different sectors of the economy to work in tandem in order for society to function; however, during the Covid-19 pandemic, workers from industries deemed essential are particularly necessary in order for America to respond to Covid-19.

This newfound gratitude for workers from essential industries has also highlighted a new social stratification in the United States into healthcare workers, essential workers (from non-healthcare industries), and non-essential workers. With non-essential workers ordered to stay at home, many have lost their jobs and others are relegated into more cloistered roles in society. Meanwhile essential workers and healthcare workers continue to work outside of the home and have gained more elevated and highlighted roles in society as their jobs become increasingly important. Social media has played a massive role in this new stratification as it highlights healthcare workers and essential workers, with little interest given to non-essential workers. While healthcare and essential workers undoubtedly deserve praise for the work they are doing and putting themselves at risk of contracting Covid-19 to work on behalf of others, this stratification system is a newfound aspect of a separated, stratified organic solidarity society that is being shown and reinforced through social media.

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity: Complementarities in Times of Crisis

While Durkheim's work on solidarity would suggest that mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity exist independently of one another, this unprecedented national experience suggests otherwise. Rather than being strictly defined by one or the other, our society has proven that mechanical and organic solidarity can exist in tandem, and even complement one another. While the United States' economic system and societal structure may exhibit the tendencies of an organic solidarity system, the shared social experience of Covid-19 and social distancing creates a shared social reality that brings mechanical solidarity into the mix. Given the highly stratified and unequal nature of the United States (as discussed in the critiques of the current presence of mechanical solidarity), even in a time of crisis we cannot see a truly mechanical solidarity system. Instead, these two forms of solidarity exist in tandem as Covid-19 remains a social reality for all Americans (with groups within the United States experiencing it differently) and an increased focus on the economic subdivisions within our country necessary for national function and combatting Covid-19. Undoubtedly an imperfect and brief analysis of an increasingly complex relationship between mechanical and organic solidarity during Covid-19, my attempt to discuss these topics through the lens of social media only begins to delve into a richer, deeper issue.

Reflections and Looking Towards the Future

Being only several months into a crisis that looks to last for many more months (and perhaps years), I can only write from this limited perspective. Daily realities during the pandemic are constantly evolving and will continue to do so as states lift social distancing orders, attempts to create a vaccine become more successful, and our economy begins to rebound. Given this

changing nature, I hope to revisit this topic (or for someone else to) following the pandemic to have a better and deeper understanding of how mechanical and organic solidarity are presenting themselves and currently presenting themselves. This analysis has also presented questions about solidarity in the United States during crisis in general. Future research comparing past national crises like 9/11 and/or local crises like mass shootings and natural disasters with the Covid-19 pandemic would likely exemplify fascinating patterns, similarities, and differences. With questions and uncertainty still surrounding this topic, I look forward to future anthropological analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic (be it my own or that by actual anthropologists) to help me and my peers better understand the complexity and nuances of this period in our lives.

Symbols of Solidarity as Resistance and Self-preserving Exclusion in a Rural Vermont Town

Haegan O'Rourke

When my mom and dad get ready for their weekly grocery store visit, they put on their shoes and jackets and inevitably ask me, "Where are your keys? We want to take your car." Since the start of the 2020 Covid-19 quarantine I have been living with my family in the small Vermont town that I'll call Little Elm. My family is originally from Connecticut, but decided to sequester ourselves in our second home, away from the main epicenter of the disease. I go to school in Vermont and moved in with my family in Little Elm after my campus was evacuated for the semester. A couple months before leaving, I registered my car in the state of Vermont, a fact that at the time I made the decision was rather trivial. However, in this moment of crisis where social facts and realities are constantly being renegotiated, that Vermont license plate has grown to be the locus of scrutiny and conflict. The green and white plate has transformed into a multivocal symbol informed by decades of economic inequalities and constructed stigma within closely knit Vermont communities, dictating who in this liminal moment belongs in the region and who does not. This paper explores how forms of social and cultural capital vary between Vermont locals and second home owners from New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut as well as how the risk associated with travel in the time of Covid-19 illuminates these inequalities and results in resistance by locals. I draw from the discourses pertaining to this topic within the Little Elm Vermont Community Forum Facebook page from March 14 - March 18.

The period from March 2020 until May 2020, when this paper was written, can be understood as a liminal period. Victor Turner paid particular attention to these periods of time when individual positions within laws, customs, convention and ceremony are blurred, forcing a renegotiation of social norms and allowing for the clarification of existing inequalities within given groups. (Moore 2019: 186) In the case of Little Elm and the symbolic role of Vermont license plates, this liminal time forces community members to assess whether people from out of state belong in these rural, vulnerable communities. One poster in the Little Elm Vermont Community Forum (henceforth LVCF) even said, "Everyone needs to put on hold all normal feelings, including our guests to the area" (LVCF Post #1) testifying to the mutually recognized

in-between status of the town in March of 2020. Normal economic dependence on tourism is being weighed with health and concerns over infrastructure, meaning the discussions extant in LVCF exist only because of the in-between status of social norms as a result of the global pandemic, though they are informed by historical relationships and inequalities.

The LVCF Facebook page describes its goals as, “We are dedicated to providing the exchange of important information directly relevant to Little Elm and the surrounding communities. There is one thing we all have in common: we care about our community” (LVCF Post #2). The forum was largely devoid of Covid-19 discussions until March 14th, focusing on live music events, the specials at local restaurants and hiking recommendations. However on the 14th, Greg, the LVCF administrator, posted a paragraph urging people from high-infection rate areas to stop coming to Vermont, because of the limited capacities of rural medical institutions (LVCF Post #3). This post incited a thread of over 80 comments by more than 50 different posters, focusing on the recent behavior of second home owners and whether their decision to quarantine in Vermont was risky, if it was moral, or economically stimulating. I do not intend to make the urban and rural sides of this debate monoliths of ideological homogeneity. Interlocutors from both sides of the argument have wide variation in their arguments and thoughts about social distancing, taxation and individual freedoms, however, all individuals in this discourse draw from a collective imagination of both Vermonters and second home owners from New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

In this discussion, Vermonters are spoken about as a solid network of vulnerable, steadily aging, lower income groups. They care about the people around them, know where their food comes from, drive trucks and enjoy campfire cookouts (LVCF Post #4). Even the LVCF’s mission alludes to this idea of care and solidarity between those living in Little Elm, Vermont, emphasizing community above all else. Durkheim would describe this communal development as an example of organic solidarity, where Vermonters all occupy different niches in the cultural scheme but are bound together by the collective affiliation with the state (Moore 2019: 37).

In contrast to this narrative of community, the out-of-state, part-time residents are conceptualized as rich (LVCF Post #5), frantic (LVCF Post #6), individualistic (LVCF Post #7), and unbridled vectors of disease (LVCF Post #6). To employ Pierre Bourdieu’s outline of varying forms of capital, second-home owners have immense amounts of economic capital, but their status as out of state residents who may have been exposed to the virus and who have not contributed extensive time to neighbors or community groups strips them of any social or cultural capital in the Little Elm context (Bourdieu 1986). The conflict expressed in the LVCF discussion is the inability for that economic capital to be converted into social or cultural capital within the imagined community of Little Elm. Geoff, one member of the LVCF discussion, argues in favor of second-home owners migrating, saying, “they pay their taxes and spend a ton of money here. They have as much right as anyone to be here” (LVCF Post #8). Another poster, Karen, goes as far as to use her economic capital as a bribe for local businesses to grant her acceptance in the town, saying “For anyone that owns or manages a business and is posting to this, supporting such nonsense about homeowners not coming up, I for one will never ever give

your business another penny of business”(LVCF Post #9). Greg, the initial administrator, refutes this claim by saying, “Whether you pay taxes or not here is irrelevant. If coming to VT means that if and when you need medical assistance you can’t get it, that isn’t helping you or your VT neighbors”(LVCF Post #10). Geoff and Karen employ economism, the idea that all forms of capital can be reduced to economic capital, to lubricate the transition from economic to social capital, but many other posters are less accepting of this shift.

Bourdieu notes that social capital “cannot act instantaneously, unless they have been established and maintained for a long time, as if for their own sake” (Bourdieu 1986). These forms of social establishment are what delineate locals from part-timers. The formation of solidarity within the Little Elm community is built upon these agreed considerations of those around you and local authenticity, and inclusion within these communities directly relates to a level of gradually accumulated social and cultural capital. In this liminal moment, the priority of many locals has shifted from the economic stability of tourist towns to the health of the network of citizens. Thus, whereas in the past, economic investment in the town awarded second-home owners honorary access to the community, Covid-19 and risk of declining health have obstructed these conventional transitions of capital. Original posts like Greg’s and other locals resist the dominant assumption that possession of economic capital directly leads to inclusion within the Little Elm community.

In these LVCF posts, frustrations pertaining to capital conversions, entitlement and infection find their material, symbolic embodiment in license plates. Plates have the unique capacity to identify the origin of many individuals who could otherwise be mistaken as locals. Therefore this conflict that has recently surged to the forefront of community discussion has turned the license plate into what Sherry Ortner would identify as a key symbol (Ortner 2007: 69). Turner notes that the meanings associated with symbols are endlessly negotiated by actors in culture (LVCF Post #11), and in the case of plates, they have gained a new value and importance in the Vermont community as indicators of people to be skeptical about, people who lack the social and cultural capital allocated to true community members. This has long been the case, where non-locals have accumulated negative social capital due to their exclusion from authentic Vermont networks. However, in the current liminal time with the virus posing a health threat to the aging rural community, the plates have evolved into a more important symbol. One local who got frustrated by the conversations in the forum posted “I, for one, can’t wait to get rid of these fucking green license plates!!” (LVCF Post #12). Another similarly exasperated woman wrote, “Go back to complaining about Connecticut plates parking in handicapped spaces if it makes you feel better” (LVCF Post #13), referring to a previous post that linked the travel of second-home owners to other morally deviant behaviors. These plates have come to stand for the entirety of the imagined traits associated with locals and out-of-towners. They morph into the site for moral scrutiny, a symbol thinly veiling the conflicts in converting forms of capital and the economic dependence of Vermont locals on tourism.

When I spoke to my mom about writing this paper, explaining to her the way I am interpreting license plates as symbols and connecting this site of conflict with larger distributions of capital, she said to me, “so the green plates represent the good and the out of state people

the bad?” In this situation, even posters in the forum who were adamant about second-home owners not coming to live in their homes were conflicted about the morality of the migration. It is not easy to paint the issue as “black and white” (LVCF Post #14), as poster Max would maintain. When families are attempting to stay healthy in face of a massive health crisis, saying they are evil or morally absent also erases their complicated desire to live, as poster Eme writes (LVCF Post #15). I am not attempting to impose my individual morality on those moving to Vermont, but instead to illuminate how the solidarity between Vermont residents can lead to discourses in which out-of-state second-home owners are understood as outsiders, thus lacking the capability to exercise social capital in a time where the social order is being disrupted. In a state where high income part time residents often have the dominant role in navigating towns and discourses, this liminal period produced by the Covid-19 pandemic allows for discursive resistance amongst Little Elm locals, solidifying the imagined network of solidarity and the imagined traits that define what is imagined as local authenticity and community.



Chapter 3: Agency and Power Under Lockdown

Introduction

In these unprecedented times, pre-existing divisions in American society have deepened as individuals respond differently to media messaging, state-ordered lockdowns, and regulation of bodies and space. Freedom, independence, and individual agency are hallmarks of the American political system — but the Covid-19 crisis has turned a spotlight on how the expression of these values can conflict with the well-being of other individuals. When anti-social-distancing protestors challenge stay-at-home orders, they put others at risk. This chapter explores a diverse set of case studies, starting with an interview with a college student, to analyses of reporting on current events regarding economic lockdown protests and police action during Covid-19, and finishes with an interview with an anti-self-isolationist. As political tensions in the United States have facilitated a polarizing ideology amongst its citizens in recent years, our aim is to understand the factors influencing the multifaceted nature of individual agency during this pandemic. By applying Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social fields, Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, Sherry Ortner's power-agency dynamic, cultural schema and serious games theory, and Eric Wolf's four levels of power, we explore the ways in which economic status, personal setting, race, and perceptions of the role of government affect individual agency and action during the coronavirus.

A Lesson on Empathy in the Time of Coronavirus

Maddie Lyons

The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed people's social environments. This is particularly acute for college students, whose daily interactions went from being with all of their friends and classmates to solely their families. I interviewed a Middlebury student, a junior named Sarah, in an attempt to learn how she feels the new social environment has changed her experience. Sarah spoke about feeling a kind of isolation, both concerning her friends who she once felt so close to, and with the greater political discourse she witnessed in the media surrounding the crisis. My interview with Sarah was evidence for the way we change our social fields during the pandemic as we begin to think and act differently and create a new detached feeling from those who we used to engage with every day. Simultaneously, coronavirus has emphasized the already harsh boundaries of social class that divide us, making the disconnect between people who are not in the same economic situation even more pronounced.

Sarah left school to return to her family's home in New Hampshire to quarantine with three siblings, two parents, and her grandmother. While all of them being in the same house is sometimes overwhelming, she is lucky, she admits, that there is ample space for all them to sleep and work, and plenty of money for groceries. Since leaving Middlebury in March, Sarah's life at home has been characterized by strict lockdown orders. She says, "Right now being at home means living with eight people in one house including my grandma who is 85 and my dad who has an auto-immune condition and only one functioning lung." Given these vulnerabilities her family has been extremely careful since the pandemic began. At first, this was less challenging as all of her friends were following similar precautions, so she never felt as though she was missing out on social interactions. However, as the discussion of reopening continues and many begin to take lockdown less seriously, Sarah expresses anxiety. She said, "Even as people are starting to loosen up and going on socially distant walks together or sitting far apart outside, that makes me feel stressed because I have my grandma living at home so if I were to come into contact with something and bring it home that would be really serious." Sarah describes the awkwardness of trying to go on a walk with a friend but feeling uncomfortable the whole time as her friend kept coming too close to her for comfort and she would feel the need to take a step away. This discomfort resulting from the clear disconnect in opinion about what is safe right now, is what has made Sarah feel so isolated.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus can help to illuminate what factors were adding to Sarah's sense of isolation. In general terms, Bourdieu sees 'habitus,' individual routine behavior, as the product of the 'social field' or environment one exists in. Sarah realizes that her stance on how seriously to take social distancing has been entirely defined by those who she is surrounded by-- what Bourdieu would call her social field. He explains the relationship between a person's social field and their behaviors by emphasizing the effect of one's "practical relation to the world, the preoccupied, active presence in the world through which the world imposes its presence, with its urgencies, its things to be done and said" (Bourdieu 1992: 25). The urgency to stay socially distant, and how that should be done, Sarah admits, are entirely the product of her living situation, which, in this time of lockdown has entirely defined her 'practical relation to the world.' She said, "The way that we are acting right now is probably a lot different than the way we would be acting if we were only responsible for ourselves." Seeing how her friends, who she once felt so similar to are now taking a totally different approach to quarantine makes Sarah realize how much the responsibility of living directly with loved ones who are vulnerable has affected her opinions on what is right. Sarah adds, "But then we have also been saying how we probably should all be being that careful as if we have someone vulnerable at home because that's why this isn't going away-- people feel invincible." She notices that the same friends who are taking social distancing less seriously, still express empathy for the elders and immunocompromised, but, because they do not see the direct effects of their actions on those people, as no one vulnerable is a part of their direct social fields, it becomes easier to ignore social distancing.

What is so isolating about this situation, is that the friends that Sarah feels this disconnect from, are people that she used to relate to so well. As Bourdieu would put it, they

used to share very similar 'practical relations to the world.' The socialization of their upbringings were very similar, as they grew up in the same town, were raised by loving parents, participated in sports, and attended elite private institutions making them compatible friends, with an overlapping habitus, through it all. However, in this time of crisis, as our social fields are so strictly limited, and now only include immediate household members, schisms emerge. Even in bonds like Sarah's 15-year strong connections to her friends, the disconnect is palpable and most certainly isolating.

Other divisions, particularly on the basis of class, have been amplified by the pandemic. Bourdieu explains that social class is one of the most prominent factors affecting habitus. He states, "A social class-- a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditionings-- is at the same time a class of biological individuals having the same habitus" (Bourdieu 1992: 100). The way that social class has begun to affect our behaviors and perceptions of the world during the coronavirus pandemic is even more dramatic, as we sit inside very rarely exposing ourselves to people in public places who might come from different economic backgrounds. I found this to be true of Sarah's experience as she and I continued our discussion of the country reopening, and extended it beyond her personal experience to what she was observing in the news as a part of the political discourse on the topic.

Sarah's immediate reaction was distaste towards those who were pushing for the country to reopen. She says, "The main argument I have seen in the media against lockdowns is that the government telling you to stay home is not in line with American freedom, but not wearing a mask or going into a restaurant puts other people at risk." She pointed out the paradoxical nature of this claim saying, "Those people who are going out and interacting are taking away the freedom of those who are vulnerable to even go out and do small things like go on walks and or to the grocery store." This freedom argument, she asserted, just did not make sense. At this point, I pushed her a little. I asked what she thought about the masses of people who are unemployed, have yet to receive money from the government, and now have no way to buy groceries for their families, so they are protesting to go back to work. This caused Sarah to pause, and she admitted that this wasn't something she had spent a lot of time thinking about. She said, "It's hard, because I have been living with people who face extreme health risks right now so that has been shaping my opinion on what needs to be done. But I guess because I only stay in my house I don't really know what 30 million unemployed looks like, or how we are supposed to deal with that as a country." Sarah's words emphasize the fact that the already divisive boundaries of social class have only been exacerbated during coronavirus, as we sit at home with the only source of exposure to the outside world coming filtered through the media.

My conversation with Sarah was a lesson in empathy. We can call ourselves progressive and open-minded, and say that we care about those who are marginalized in society; however, Pierre Bourdieu's theory on how our environment affects our actions shows us that when we are removed from their presence, whether it be the medically vulnerable or those struggling financially, true empathy is a challenge. When we do not witness someone's struggle firsthand, it is not easy to form our own opinions and decisions based on them, as it is not affecting us directly.

Agency and Power in the Lockdown Protests

Lauren Eskra

I chose this topic based off of an article in *The Atlantic* that I recently read titled “We’re Still Living and Dying in the Slaveholders’ Republic” by Ibram X. Kendi. In this article, Kendi argues that the intellectual roots of the lockdown protests lie in the slaveholders’ understanding of freedom:

Slaveholders desired...the freedom to harm. Which is to say, in coronavirus terms, the freedom to infect. Slaveholders disavowed a state that secured any form of communal freedom—the freedom of the community *from* slavery, from disenfranchisement, from exploitation, from poverty, from all the demeaning and silencing and killing... Which is to say, in coronavirus terms, the freedom from infection (Kendi 2020)

Kendi uses ‘freedom’ to ask certain questions about the protesters: how do these people understand choice? What does it mean to have power over the decisions you make? What is the protestors’ relation to power? I find this idea of freedom engaging; unfortunately, in order to analyze it anthropologically, I need to stop using it. Anthropological theorists use terms like ‘agency’ to ask the same questions. I will follow their lead. In this chapter, I examine the causes of the lockdown protests using Wolf’s ‘four levels of power,’ and Ortner’s ‘serious games,’ with significant emphasis on the role of white supremacy in the American mind.

To begin, I must provide a brief overview of the lockdown protests. The protestors are generally a part of the American middle class—long-distance truckers and nurses—but organized and funded by the wealthy conservative class (Al Jazeera 2020). These two groups, due to their different class statuses, have different goals. The protestors wish to return to work; they worry about paying their mortgages and feeding their children. The funders wish for everyone else to return to work. While they can work from home and will continue to do so in safety and privacy behind a personal computer, these wealthy conservatives miss luxury. Someone to clean the house every week and pour them wine in fancy restaurants. We see this dichotomy in the lockdown protests: the wealthy encourage others to protest, while remaining inside themselves.

In order to fully understand this morass of a situation, I will break it down into Wolf’s ‘four levels of power.’ The act of protesting reveals the power of the individual. Although these protestors are acting as a group, you only need one person to protest. Egoistic power comes in the form of community leaders encouraging protests and speaking at rallies—pastors, for example, or maybe even a popular moderator of a Facebook group. The third and fourth levels of power, however, are more complicated. On the one hand, these protestors and funders are resisting the organizational power of state governments. They resent the attempts to limit public space, and so they protest in the most public spaces of all – the seats of local government. But again, wealthy conservative donors are not protesting, just encouraging others to. In some

sense, they are encouraging as much organizational power as the state governments over the middle class protestors, driving them out of their homes rather than keeping them inside. Finally, we arrive at the fourth level of power, or the power to control thought. On this level, the state government exerts very little power over both the protestors and the funders. It fails to make them think in terms of communal health, or as Ibram X. Kendi puts it, “the freedom from” (2020). Here, the historical understandings of capitalism and white supremacy reign supreme. On the most basic level, slaveholders forced enslaved people to work and then profited off of that work. The conservative funders of these protests clearly hold a similar mindset—harming others for personal gain. The protestors do not have this birds-eye view. They cannot (perhaps correctly) conceive of a world where the wealthy share their wealth to help others in a pandemic. The only way to survive is through work.

Sherry Ortner’s ‘serious games’ clarify the way protestors understand work. These people do fairly well in the American economy. They are not the wealthiest, but they make more than most Americans, especially and importantly non-white ones. They know the rules of the game, and they know how to do well in the game – work. The wealthy do not threaten these people because they know if they just work more, work harder, they too will become wealthy. The economic shutdown changes the game entirely. These people can no longer work and therefore succeed at the game. Instead they must wait in their homes for stimulus and unemployment money from a slow, semi-functional government. To add insult to injury, every American citizen receives the same amount of money. Even if unemployment is more than they were making at a job, it does not matter. The middle class requires a lower class. You do not win the game if you do just as well as everyone else.

The lockdown protests are not displays of ignorance but rather the grounds where two disparate groups fight to maintain agency and power in the context of unprecedented catastrophe. While incredibly narcissistic, these protestors are probably right in their understanding of the American political economy. Our government leaders would rather starve the middle class and poor than tax the rich and send multiple stimuluses. In a choice between possibly dying of the novel coronavirus and definitely dying of starvation, these protestors are quite reasonably choosing the former. State governments seem to agree—they are all opening up, or plan to soon.

Racial Bias in Police Action During Covid-19: Biopower, power-agency, and habitus

Madeleine Joinnides

Note from the author: *This article was written before streets across the country were saturated with BLM activists protesting for Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others killed at the hands of police; for defunding and dismantling the police; and for the recognition of systemic racism in American society. Minor edits have been made to reflect these recent events, but the piece maintains the spirit of discussion regarding racist policing of social distance and mask-wearing guidelines in the early stages of the pandemic.*

The novel coronavirus has brought to light many existing inequalities in American society. Class divisions are intensified as the privilege to stay at home is not available to all and the impact of the virus takes an amplified toll on low-income communities. However, class is not the only lens through which one can view the exacerbation of inequality due to the pandemic. While Black populations in America are contracting Covid-19 at disproportionate rates as a result of a number of compounding factors, racial bias in the police force as well as discrimination by the general public complicates this population's access to public space. The *New York Times* reported that the New York Police Department arrested 40 people for violating social distancing rules in Brooklyn from March 17 to May 4 (Southall 2020). Over one-third of arrests were made in the majority Black neighborhood of Brownsville, none in the predominantly white neighborhood of Park Slope; 35 of the people arrested were Black, four were Hispanic, and one was white. Many of these arrests occurred in late May as images were concurrently circulating of white-saturated public spaces in Lower Manhattan, Williamsburg, and Long Island City, where officers were handing out masks to folks relaxing in crowded parks. This racial police bias is not unique to the New York metro area; armed white protesters demonstrated in Michigan, obviously violating the 6-foot regulation and faced little police pushback, with merely one arrest and zero police violence, meanwhile three Black people in separate circumstances were killed in an 8-hour span in neighboring Indiana, two of whom were unarmed and none of whom were part of a group demonstration (Bogel-Burroughs 2020). The stipulation to wear masks in public is also a complicated matter and a double-edged sword; Berkeley professor Osagie Obasogie compares wearing masks while Black to wearing a hoodie—“where it is not uncommon for racial minorities wearing hoodies to be considered a threat, while others freely wear them without fear of harassment a threatening symbol” (Natividad 2020). For example, two Black men wearing medical facemasks recorded their experience of being followed by a police officer into a Walmart, and being asked to leave because the officer believed they were “acting suspiciously” (Dale 2020). Senators Kamala Harris, Cory Booker and others have formally requested in a letter to Attorney General Bill Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray to “immediately provide training and guidance relating to bias in law enforcement during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic” (Harris et al. 2020). The United States has an unfortunate and deep history of racial discrimination in the police force rooted in its origins, and this essay seeks to explain recent events of racial discrimination during the coronavirus through a

theoretical lens. A Foucauldian approach to biopower contextualizes the unique role which police officers play in the current moment, and biopower interacts with Bourdieu's notion of habitus and social fields; these theories compositely relate to individual police officer behavior.

As I write this essay, I believe it is imperative to acknowledge my position as a white middle throughout this semester to a relevant contemporary topic, my identity and ideologies no doubt influence my brief analysis of a deeply complex issue which deserves more than a few pages. Using Bourdieu, Foucault, and Ortner, I briefly explore the ways in which acts of biopower facilitate and amplify racial bias by police officers in times of crisis.

The habitus, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, is a system of "cognitive and motivating structures" (Bourdieu 2019: 482) that is rooted in history and past experience which influence both individual and group action, thereby reproducing past experience into the present. Bourdieu famously describes habitus as the following:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 2019: 481)

The habitus, Bourdieu writes, provokes 'reasonable' or 'common-sense' actions which "are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field" (Bourdieu 2016: 500). This is where social fields come in; social and physical space are organized by social fields, which are characterized by different behaviors, 'norms,' and rules. A person's habitus therefore interacts uniquely with social fields depending on how similar or different their position is to the 'norms' of the field. Further, a member of a group habitus, although consisting of a diversity of unique individual habitus, will also reflect a common mindset of that group habitus. This theory is applicable to any sort of organized group, including police officers. In "Changing Police Culture," Janet Chan explores the four dimensions of cultural knowledge in street-level police work and their relation to police habitus. While I do not have the space to review her analysis in depth, these dimensions facilitate ways to categorize (read: stereotype) the types of people officers come in contact with, to formulating general ideas about when, why, and how to 'correctly' take police action (Chan 1996). This builds a general 'common sense' which, as the theory of habitus suggests, is influenced by past history and guides individual police action in the present.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault defines biopower as "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1990:140). Biopower has the ability, therefore, to regulate peoples' movement, space, time, and activities. While biopower is often used as a method of analysis for embedded or institutional means of subjugation – such as prisons and schools – the present moment allows for a more obvious expression of biopower, especially at the level of state governance. As forty-seven states in America have instituted some form of restrictions, including mandatory mask-wearing, shutting down businesses, and defining appropriate spatial

organization of bodies, state governments are overtly exerting their biopower over their citizens for their own health and safety (Secon and Woodward 2020). From another angle, biopower is somewhat comparative to the habitus, in that both affect the bodies and actions of individuals, albeit in different ways. Connecting these concepts, Bourdieu writes that “the habitus...is what makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them practically, and so to keep them in activity” (Bourdieu 2016: 502) As representatives of state authority, police departments are perceived as important means of maintaining order and reinforcing new regulations during these times of crisis; they are agents of state-ordered biopower. This heightened sense of power then interacts with the habitus, amplifying one’s sense of duty in their position of authority and thereby justifying actions such as arrests (or lack thereof) and physical violence which may be influenced by racial bias depending on the police officer’s habitus.

Sherry Ortner writes that resistance is a form of how power relates to agency, oriented around domination and resistance to it. From armed protests to holding funeral gatherings and barbecues in the street, there are myriad ways to violate the biopower of social distancing rules and stay-at-home orders. These instances show the diversity of ways to demonstrate “power-agency,” but such acts of power-agency are punished (i.e., in the form of arrest) differently based on racial bias and the police habitus. By using the habitus model, the actions of police can be understood as not just as the result of a homogeneous police “culture,” but rather as the amalgamation of past experiences, unspoken ‘norms,’ and as reactions to events in relation to the social field that build into such culture. To understand the role that racial bias in the police force plays during times of nationwide crisis, it is useful to explore the social fields which police navigate. As the American police force has historically been known to maintain racial bias and discrimination, the theory of habitus therefore promulgates that such discriminatory propensities are reactivated in the present. This therefore produces and reproduces a system of distrust among communities of color, minimizing the social capital of police officers amongst communities of color. By viewing public spaces as social fields, often times police officers navigate a variety of social fields which, as a result of racial segregation, redlining, white flight, and environmental racism (to name just a few factors), differ in demographic population. The police habitus interacts with these social fields differently, influenced by the perceptions that officers make of people occupying the public spaces as well as the public space itself – harkening back to Chan’s dimensions of cultural police knowledge, for example via officers’ categorization of civilians. There is no one specific way in which a police officer might act according to habitus theory; the habitus generates systemic actions while also allowing the officer flexibility and creativity in a particular social field, which Chan relates to police ‘commonsense’ and ‘policing skills’ (Chan 1996: 115). These and other facets of the police habitus concerted influence their interactions with communities of color. In Southall’s *New York Times* reporting which compares public gatherings in Lower Manhattan, Williamsburg and Long Island City to those in Black and brown communities in Brooklyn, the interaction of the police habitus in different social fields resulted in racial discrimination, in the forms of arrest and violence, inaction or even aid (like handing out masks to park-goers) for similar sorts of gatherings (Southall 2020). The exertion of biopower by state government allows police officers

to exercise their authority in enforcing social distancing without a previous personal history of doing so; the habitus therefore plays a greater role in filling a void where the act of arresting civilians for violating social distancing laws is not a normal occurrence which officers regularly train for and have experience with. This may also be seen through the lens of the power-agency relation for civilians; we see how police habitus amplifies or limits people's power-agency in the very act of existing outside; taken to the (very real) extreme, white armed Michiganans are able to demonstrate in the faces of minimally-protected police officers during times when their government calls for social distancing, while nonviolent, unarmed Black Lives Matter protests were faced with officers in SWAT-like riot gear long before Covid-19, when the right to protest was not complicated by social distancing. Covid-19 stipulations and armed white supremacist protestors aside, it would be a disservice to not acknowledge cases such as Stephon Clark who was shot and killed because officers thought he was pointing a gun, while he was merely holding an iPhone. According to Bourdieu, the racial bias of the police habitus will perpetuate indefinitely in the present past via cognitive influence and reactivation unless the logic of their social field changes. However, I see positive change and progress as people find ways even during the time of a global pandemic – for example, in the case of online organizing for Breonna Taylor – to organize, question, discuss, and protest this discrimination.

Current reporting reveals that Black Americans are not only disproportionately contracting and dying from the novel coronavirus, but also face racial bias at the hands of police officers during a time when the exertion of biopower in policing is incredibly high. The aim of this exploration has been to examine reports which reveal racist practices by police officers during Covid-19 and find explanations for such actions in theory. By applying Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and social fields and contextualizing the current situation in an unusual event of overt exertion of state biopower, we see that historical events, perceptions, and space all play important roles in explaining the unbalanced police action against Black Americans during the coronavirus pandemic specifically, let alone throughout years of history of racist policing since the institution's inception. This short report is by no means all-encompassing, but rather the continuation of a conversation in the context of specific theory; this conversation must be ongoing within elite institutions such as Middlebury College, but also outside of the bounds of high academic theoretical lingo. Racism in the police force, one trait of a society whose governance has benefited off of systemic oppression, is an incredibly complex and important issue that requires continuous action and conversation both within and far beyond academic speculation.

“Common Sense” Thinking When Things Head South

Bochu Ding

A well-documented trip to Disneyland, pictures with friends and relatives, photos of puppies glancing intently into the woods — these vignettes flashed by as I scrolled through Arnie's Facebook page. But what drew my attention were the most recent posts: “PLANDEMIC

Movie: The Hidden Agenda Behind COVID 19” and “[URGENT] Dr Rashid Buttar Reveals that Coronavirus was Patented by Bill Gates in 2016.” The former, hosted on Youtube, had been removed; a warning indicating false information accompanied the latter (Arnie n.d. post 1).

Scrolling further down reveals an ad for gun ammunition, followed closely by photos of Arnie and Donna’s recent trip to Florida. I stared at the beaches, restaurants, and beer in the images — and the throng of passers-by in the background stared back. In April 2020 Florida seemed “normal,” Arnie reported in the captions (Arnie n.d. post 2).

Arnie and Donna had traveled to Florida for business. Based in the Midwest, the husband-and-wife team trains dogs professionally. A master of his craft — and a protégé of one of the best in the field — Arnie had made a name for himself. But comfort and stability hadn’t always been a given; Arnie did not have an “easy life,” according to a mutual friend. Growing up in a small town with less than 500 residents, Arnie had worked as a railroad worker before entering the business. Now, Arnie and Donna have a stable source of income, a house with a “real big garden,” the pups, and each other — they’re living the American dream.

But it was a sense of desperation that prompted Arnie and Donna to travel south. The unfolding pandemic stymied a deal that would have raked in considerable income, leaving Arnie and Donna scrambling to explore other sources of revenue. “Desperation forced us to make some money and keep life going,” Arnie recalled. “We went back and forth regarding going or not going — fear kicked in and kicked out due to uncertainty.”

“I don’t want to paint too dark of a picture,” Arnie later qualified, “I am not a big believer in a ton of debt — so financially, we’re in good shape.” But, ultimately, Arnie and Donna decided to make the leap of faith and venture southward. Florida’s humid and tropical climate presented a new opportunity: their dogs would help track down an invasive species threatening Florida’s wildlife.

But for Arnie and Donna, the journey itself was illuminating. “Florida is very open,” Arnie commented. “To some extent, we were misinformed [about the coronavirus]. A picture was painted way darker than what was really happening.”

And that’s where the mistrust comes in.

Arnie recalls believing in the warnings “100%”: staying home, social distancing, scrubbing his hands — the whole shebang. But as the nation descended into chaos — and what he observed in his local communities and during his trip to Florida conflicted more and more with the rhetoric online and in the news — everything became blurrier. For example, Arnie pointed to the packed Costco stores that looked “crazier than Christmas time.”

“This whole thing started out with a whole lot of fear,” Arnie said. “Now with a little bit of education and a little bit of common sense, I don’t know that we should be fearing as much as what we are.” Throughout the conversation, Arnie continues to return to this idea of “common sense.”

What does “common sense” mean? It’s unclear; Arnie uses the term to describe myriad things: his own take on conservatism, the paradigm of thinking that led Donna and him to the Sunshine State, the reasoning behind his rejection of government aid — and the very conversation we were having. According to Arnie, 10 years ago, these “common sense”

conversations occurred without controversy — people were allowed to disagree with one another. “It seems like the last few years, it’s to the point where we almost hate one another if we have a different opinion, and I don’t understand where that came from,” Arnie reflected.

While “common sense” seems to be a nebulous concept, the instances where it occurs are characterized by a unifying factor: lost agency. When Arnie describes the ebbing away of “common sense” conversations, he is also expressing the frustration of losing the power to engage and access those dialogues and discourses that were once a given. Similarly, Arnie’s framing of his decision to travel across the nation as one guided by “common sense” thinking reinstated his agency, presenting him with a clear path forward during the chaos of a pandemic that has stripped him of the ability to act.

This leitmotif of lost agency is perhaps most conspicuous in how Arnie positions the role of the government amid the crisis. To Arnie, the economic stimulus delivered to Americans is anything but no-strings-attached or “common sense” — rather, it cripples individuals and tethers them to the government in a way that renders them both dependent and subordinate. Arnie stresses that he is a giver — that he sees the importance in providing for those in less fortunate circumstances — but he doesn’t need the government to tell him how he should do it; collective action guided by the government implicates the cession of his own ability to act.

“The government shouldn’t control us, we’re supposed to control our government,” Arnie expounded. For Arnie, the government’s active role in addressing the pandemic — whether that be stay-at-home orders or economic relief for individuals and business entities — is but a mystification of a higher power’s insidious advances in stripping away individual rights.

In her work, anthropologist Sherry Ortner proposes the concept of cultural schemas: symbolically constructed and preorganized arrangements that inform our actions (Ortner 1989:60). According to Ortner, these schemas often mediate society’s contradictions (Ortner 1989:60-61). Jerry Moore uses an example from American society to elucidate Ortner’s concept. Although the U.S. is the land of opportunity where “anyone can become president,” almost every American president has been a white, Christian man. But instead of “solving” the contradiction or relinquishing the catchphrase altogether, we conform to the cultural schema by proposing scenarios — such as suggesting that the day for a person of color president or woman president is “just on the horizon” — that prescribe action and assure our sense of agency (Moore 2009: 318).

The “common sense” that Arnie lauds is an appeal to a cultural schema, mediating the tension between American individualism and a loss of personal agency — whether that be the ability to engage in conversations or assert a sense of independence free from government intervention — exacerbated by the pandemic. Applying “common sense” conforms to the cultural schema, providing a framework of thinking that justifies reclamations of lost agency. For example, Arnie points to “common sense” as a reason for striving to “be responsible and assume responsibility for ourselves and our own families.” Or, Arnie might argue that if people could use “common sense” to think about political discourse, then we would be able to have those conversations again.

“It seems to be a lot of chaos across the board,” Arnie said to me. “What it does to people like me is it backs me into a little bit of a corner, and it's not a bad corner, it's an awareness corner.” Arnie said that two years ago, he would have traveled to Florida without even a pocket knife. This time, he brought one AR-15 and two handguns. It wasn't to hurt anyone, Arnie reassured me — rather, he wanted to protect himself and protect his family.

“So why is that happening?” Arnie reflected. “You know, why do I feel that way today when I didn't two years ago?”

But perhaps the best explanation to his question came from his own words in an earlier conversation. When I had asked Arnie about why some of the protestors against stay-at-home measures brought firearms, Arnie pointed to a loss of agency. “They're trying to stress that it is our right,” he explained. “And they do feel like their rights are being messed with.” The presence of the AR-15, thus, is one that is symbolic — one that reasserts agency.

Arnie and many of what he refers to as “the AR-toting” Americans are beginning to see “their America” slip through their fingers. As America's economy and demographics shift, these individuals see constraints forming around their way of life. When Arnie speaks about “common sense” or when protestors show up weaponized, as they did at the Michigan state house on April 30, 2020, it's an attempt to reclaim agency and the ability to act — a way out of the quagmire that threatens to submerge them and deprive them of mobility. At the turn of the century, America's endeavor is to move forward — but it cannot accomplish this goal if it leaves some feeling like they've been left behind.



Conclusion

In examining how coercive economic structures marginalize particular populations, the authors of Chapter 1 concluded that the disproportionately dangerous experience of Covid-19 by “lumpenized” communities can be understood as a product of neoliberalism and hegemonic notions of power in a capitalistic sociocultural framework. Within the “lumpenization” of cultural categories during the era of Covid-19 we find new meanings, methods, and products of stratification – proving the dynamic nature of the “lumpen” modifier. By examining varied scales of analysis, the authors of Chapter 2 observed that Covid-19 is creating new forms as well reinforcing existing forms of solidarity in the United States. The Covid-19 pandemic, and the new forms of solidarity formed in reaction to the crisis it has created, seem to be leading to a profound transformation of the social order where group cooperation is central to meaningful worldmaking. Chapter 3’s authors employed several theories to explore the theme of agency to underline the diversity of lived experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our findings suggest to us that empathy is most important now, during a time when Americans are physically separated and politically polarized as never before.

The amalgamation of analyses in this report reflect Giddens’ theory of structuration in which individual agents reproduce the structures they act within; as the growing wealth gap has been a heated topic of discussion prior to Covid-19, we see inequalities being amplified and perpetuated before our eyes and on our screens in this time of crisis. Yet, as our case studies have shown, this is a moment unlike any other which allows for new forms of agency and solidarity to shift those structures. Throughout history, crises, and pandemics in particular, have been powerful catalyzers of structural transformation; the Black Death in the fourteenth century helped bring about the downfall of feudalism in Europe, and the Spanish Flu of 1918 was followed by a period of labor militancy, strike waves, and corporate consolidation culminating in the New Deal. The current moment is rife with similar revolutionary opportunities.

This collaborative effort has encompassed a number of foci, demonstrating the intricate diversity of human experience during Covid-19. This report serves as a reflection of the variety of interests and passions of our ANTH 306 class, and all of the topics covered here are deeply complex and could undoubtedly be examined further. At this moment, making any definitive conclusions about Covid-19’s effects is an extremely difficult task, however attempts to understand changes in solidarity, empathy, agency, and lumpenization at this juncture can help to better inform theoretical analysis further into the crisis or post-crisis, allowing for continuously constructive applications of anthropological theory.



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