

Issue 2 2020

Unhealthy inequalities

Jennifer Prah Ruger explores how we might achieve global health equity

Nick Timothy proposes ways to fund care for the elderly

Rana Mitter explains the latest developments in Hong Kong

RSA JOURNAL

21st century enlightenment



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Registered as a charity in England and Wales, no. 212424 and in Scotland no. SC037784

RSA Journal, Volume CLXVI

No. 5582, Issue 2 2020

ISSN: 0958-0433

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The RSA Journal is published for the RSA by Wardour, 2nd Floor, Kean House, 6 Kean Street, London WC2B 4AS
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Matthew Taylor



“The Covid-19 crisis has held up a mirror to healthcare systems worldwide”

It was an obvious choice for this edition of *RSA Journal* to focus on health and care. The Covid-19 crisis has held up a mirror to healthcare systems worldwide, and there are both good and bad things to see in the reflection. All around the globe, we have been reminded that people go into health and care work because they want to help others, even if it involves risks and sacrifices. As well as applauding the remarkable efforts of frontline workers, we have also been reminded that public health is a system in which individual behaviour, community effort and social context are as important as what happens in hospitals and GP surgeries. As Jennifer Prah Ruger explains in her article on global health inequalities, Covid-19 should be an opportunity to rethink our whole approach. In similar vein, Nikolas Rose calls for an understanding of mental health that engages more deeply with the structural causes of illness.

Resilience has been a word on many people’s lips during the crisis, as the weaknesses of important parts of our welfare state have been exposed. These include the way we support workers and those out of work, which are just two of the issues addressed in the RSA Bridges to the Future initiative, as Anthony Painter explains in his piece. The terrible death rate in our care homes and the apparent confusion and U-turns in government policy have starkly revealed the faultlines of our care system. In his article, Nick Timothy, former chief adviser to then Prime Minister Theresa May, recalls how trying to reform care cost him his job, but argues that the need to grasp the nettle is even stronger now. Any solution, he asserts, will have to include some form of tax on the wealth people hold at death.

A sustainable funding framework is vital to the future of care but there are wider questions too. Ruth Hannan and Hannah Webster encourage a humanistic approach, focusing on the kind of lives and care people want and enabling care workers to have

dignified, collaborative and satisfying jobs. And, as Renske Visser says, getting care right may also mean thinking differently about ageing and death.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted issues about how we make policy, including, of course, the role of science. The impressive Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s Digital Minister, explains how the country’s commitment to digital services and citizen engagement helped it to avoid a high death rate without locking down. Behavioural science got a bad press in the UK when it was associated with ‘herd immunity’ but, as Fadi Makki, the founder of the first nudge unit in the Middle East and of Nudge Lebanon argues, its insights are now a vital tool for policymakers.

RSA Journal is just one of the innumerable outputs of the RSA since the pandemic began. I have been incredibly impressed by the way my colleagues have adapted, generating great reports, holding popular events, convening vital conversations and generating a high profile for our work (all of this achieved by a team which has worked from home since before official lockdown began). Many of our Fellows, too, have risen to the challenge, writing over 50 blogs since March and launching projects to help their communities and those most in need. We have been honoured to support their efforts as well as providing a change toolkit for Fellows to use as local and professional communities explore the scope for progressive change in a new era.

April saw the publication of Anton Howes’ new history of the RSA, which I can strongly recommend. It was written too early to capture our response to Covid-19 or to engage fully with the important questions about history and responsibility raised by the anti-racist movement. Perhaps one day we can persuade Anton to publish an updated version. If so, he will be able to report that the first half of 2020 was a time when the Society once again rose to new challenges. ■

Matthew Taylor is Chief Executive of the RSA

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Long read



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To eradicate global health inequities, we need new institutions and systems that are based on justice, writes Jennifer Prah Ruger



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Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Digital Minister, speaks with Matthew Taylor about Taiwan's response to Covid-19



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The social roots of some mental health issues should not be underestimated, says Nikolas Rose



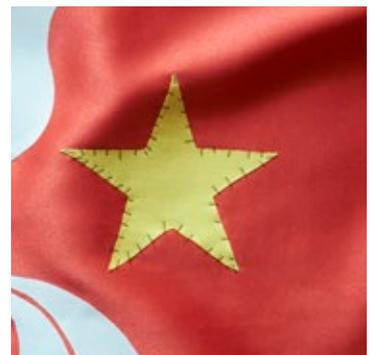
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The RSA's Catalyst Covid-19 Award round has had great success, writes Kimberley Staines



50 LAST WORD

Henning Wehn extols the joys of cycling in lockdown

Periscope

1 Between 2011 and 2018, the WHO traced 1,483 epidemic events in 172 countries (page 11).

2 Taiwan's 1922 hotline allows citizens to share ideas about how to tackle Covid-19 with the Central Epidemic Command Center (page 18).

3 The number of older people who depend on home care services or direct payments will rise by 87%, to 466,000, by 2040 (page 20).

4 Brené Brown says that courage, compassion and connection are the three components of healthy engagement with vulnerability (page 25).

5 'Choice architecture' interventions allow people to retain sovereignty, but give them a push to encourage healthier decisions (page 29).

6 There are 40 million people trapped in slavery worldwide today (page 34).

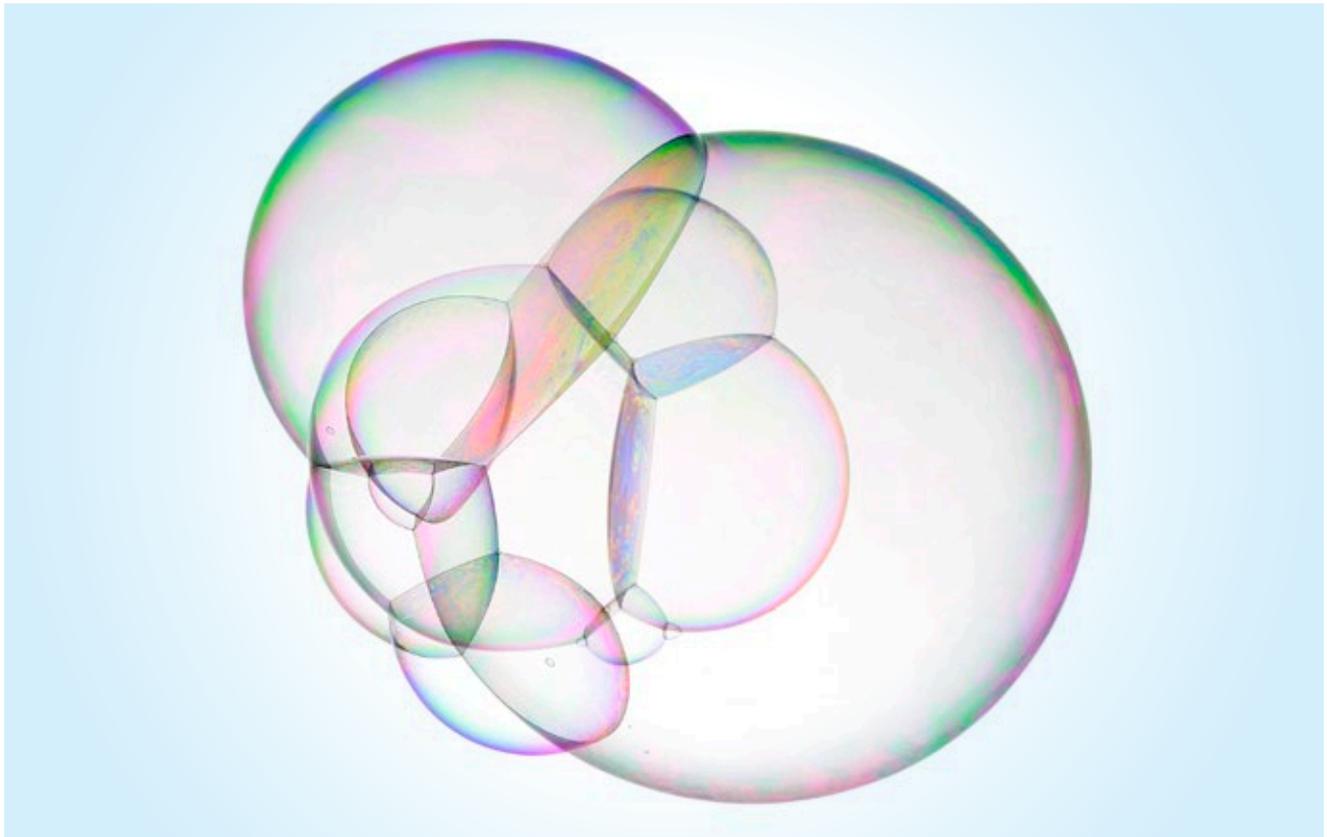
7 The oPhone would have enabled users to send one another 'scent messages'; sadly, it never reached its crowdfunding goal (page 38).

8 Hong Kong's Basic Law endows the territory with a "high degree of autonomy" (page 45).

9 Some 83% of home and residential care staff are women (page 46).

10 The RSA's fast-tracked Catalyst Award round has provided funds to 20 Fellow-led initiatives that respond to Covid-19 and its effects (page 48).

Covid-19



BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE

The challenge of Covid-19 requires new ideas, insights and initiatives

Responding to this need, in March the RSA launched Bridges to the Future, a series of articles, blog posts, podcasts and events. Outputs covered a range of areas, including how we need to act now to create a future that protects people and planet; what lockdown and longer-term trends suggest is needed to deliver a fair education for the times we live in; how we can develop stronger economic support for all and invest in

communities at scale; and the challenge of creating people-led health, care and local services.

Online events brought practitioners and policymakers together to develop and respond to the RSA's research insights, while interactive sessions exploring the RSA's changemaker toolkit offered practical guides to implementing effective change. Meanwhile, Matthew Taylor put a range of experts and thinkers on the spot in his podcast series by asking for

one big idea to help build bridges to our new future. The series examines the ideas helping to shape our current moment and our future reality, and includes guests such as environmentalist David Wallace-Wells, politician Bim Afolami and behavioural scientist Pragya Agarwal, among others.

Going forward the RSA is focusing on launching key central programmes for the years ahead, including the Future of Work and Regenerative Futures.

■ To find out more, visit www.thersa.org/bridges-future and <https://bridges-to-the-future.simplecast.com>

Design

96TH STUDENT DESIGN AWARDS

A flat-pack incubator for refugee camps, AI-driven detection systems for Alzheimer's and breast cancer, and a new way of tackling holiday hunger for disadvantaged children are among the winning projects at the RSA Student Design Awards 2019/20.

Now in its 96th year, the competition challenges emerging designers to tackle pressing social and environmental issues. This year, we received 782 entries from 19 countries, resulting in 18 winning projects. Briefs covered everything from services for displaced people to economic security, and panels were curated to incorporate industry professionals and those with lived experience.

Christopher Earney FRSA, Head of the Insights Team at the UN, joined the panel to judge the 'Dignity in Displacement' category. He said: "The RSA has a unique convening power, and that's something we need to see more of. Collaborating with the RSA on the Student Design Awards opened up a whole new diversity of thought to contribute to one of the world's most pressing challenges; the dignity and safety of those forcibly displaced by conflict."

This year's Awards Ceremony took place online on 30 July. Briefs for the RSA Student Design Awards 2020/21 will launch at the end of August.

■ To find out more, visit www.thersa.org/sda or email SDAenquiries@rsa.org.uk

RSA insights



REACHING OUT THROUGH SONG

Shapeshifter Productions, which has two FRSA trustees, has launched a new remote singalong project to support the mental health and wellbeing of isolated senior care home residents during lockdown. "Our sessions provide invaluable support and connectivity to many older vulnerable people," said Artistic Director Alison Jones. For 10 years, the charity's team of professional musicians has visited residents offering live participatory singing experiences, and their weekly Smiling Remotely Singalong Sessions are now online.

■ To find out more, contact smiling@shapeshifter-productions.com or call +44 7843739099

65%

The NHS 'volunteer army' should be redeployed after the peak of the Covid-19 crisis to offer long-term support to vulnerable citizens, according to 65% of people polled by Opinion for the RSA. Some 26% said that they were involved in supporting their local community during the pandemic; of these, 13% had started doing something new.

■ To find out more, visit www.thersa.org/futurecare

19%

Only 19% of respondents believe the fashion industry should return to business as usual following the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new Populus poll conducted as part of the RSA's Regenerative Futures programme. Half of those polled said they think the industry should do whatever it takes to become more environmentally sustainable. The RSA has outlined a series of actions, including the development of a green 'Beyond GDP' resilience fund to support circular economy innovation.

■ To find out more, visit www.thersa.org/fashion-covid

83%

A Populus poll for the RSA shows that 83% of people want schools to be more relational, ensuring that every child has a trusted adult in school who they can approach for support; such a policy was recommended by the RSA in its *Pimball Kids: Preventing School Exclusions* report. The poll also showed low trust in the government's handling of the pandemic: 49% of respondents said they did not trust the government to put children's best interests first.

■ To find out more, visit www.thersa.org/preventingexclusions

Agenda

BLACK LIVES MATTER



The RSA has been examining its culture, practices and policies and opening discussions to ensure that its workplace and wider RSA communities are places in which diversity, equity and inclusion are embedded. RSA staff have developed an independent Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Employee Network Group to facilitate conversations around inclusion and equality and to work with the senior management team and Trustee Board. These measures were announced in a statement on anti-racism released in July: “The RSA is actively seeking to increase the diversity of its Fellowship across all the protected characteristics under the 2010 Equalities Act.

“Our research seeks to address issues of exclusion and injustice along multiple dimensions, including race. Yet we know we can and must do more for a more equitable world, both in the work we do and as an organisation... We are committed to this challenge and are taking steps to confront this. Above all, there is no place for racial discrimination or inequality in today’s society.”

The RSA US released its statement on anti-racism in June, providing a framework for its continuing efforts to combat inequality and racism in the US: “We urge our Fellows to use our collective privilege to re-shape the systems and structures of our country to promote non-racist principles of safety and justice to ensure that all are protected from gross inequities in life, liberty, and wellbeing.”

■ The RSA US’s statement can be found at www.thersa.org/blm. The RSA’s anti-racism statement is at www.thersa.org/anti-racism. To find out more about the RSA’s racial equality work, visit www.thersa.org/7pathways

Fellowship

New Fellows

Carol Cooper is Head of Equality, Diversity and Human Rights at Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, where she has been instrumental in tackling workplace inequality; at the 2019 *Nursing Times* Workforce Summit & Awards she won Diversity and Inclusion Champion of the Year. Carol is also an equitable leadership consultant and Director of the Global Talent Compass consultancy.

Throughout most of his career, **Amit Kaushik** has focused on the education sector, working on areas such as inclusion and non-formal education, among others. As the India CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research, a non-profit, he leads the organisation’s efforts to support the improvement of learning in South Asia.

Make the most of your Fellowship

by connecting online and sharing your skills. Search the Fellowship at www.thersa.org/fellowship. While you’re there, don’t forget to update your own profile: www.thersa.org/my-rsa.

■ Follow us on Twitter @theRSAorg

Our Instagram is www.instagram.com/thersaorg

Join the Fellows’ LinkedIn group

www.linkedin.com/groups/3391

Where possible, Fellowship events have moved online; to find out more and connect with Fellows in our global community visit www.thersa.org/coronavirus/online-events.

Grow your idea through RSA Catalyst, which offers grants and crowdfunding for Fellow-led and new or early-stage projects with a social goal.

■ To find out more, visit our online Project Support page www.thersa.org/fellowship/project-support

Events



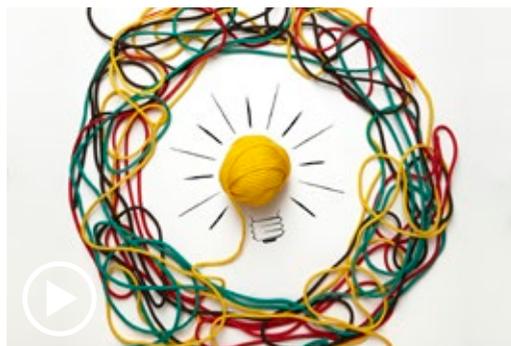
CATCH UP ONLINE

At a time of global crisis, RSA Events is hosting a new series of online conversations with leading public thinkers. Our speakers explore what this emergency reveals about our economies, our societies, ourselves – and how we might shape new ways of learning, working and caring for each other, creating more secure, sustainable lives and livelihoods for all.

■ *Subscribe to our YouTube channel and 'like' us on Facebook to catch up on the latest content*

▶ [youtube.com/thersa.org](https://www.youtube.com/thersa.org)

▶ [facebook.com/rxaeventsofficial](https://www.facebook.com/rxaeventsofficial)



SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

The Covid-19 crisis has starkly highlighted the extent to which schools have been plugging gaps in the care of vulnerable children. Can we develop a new vision and shared responsibility for young people's education, health and wellbeing? **Kiran Gill**, founder of The Difference, **Laura McInerney**, co-founder of Teacher Tapp, and **Kayleigh Wainwright**, Head of Engagement and Advocacy at UK Youth, explore the issues with the RSA's Laura Partridge.

■ *Watch now: youtu.be/yGOhWDGtwfY*
#RSABridges

INCLUSIVE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Professor Donna Hall CBE and **Clenton Farquharson MBE** share their views on the alliances, practices, tools and behaviours that would best support a united health and care system. Can we create a model of public service that is agile and resilient, able to cope with crisis and to meet the needs of all citizens?

■ *Watch now:*
youtu.be/no8k-LhJynk
#RSABridges

THINKING LONG TERM

Drawing on ideas and social change movements from around the world, philosopher **Roman Krznaric** shows how a shift from short- to long-term thinking can help us create more just, secure and sustainable societies and set us on a path to becoming the good ancestors that future generations deserve.

■ *Watch now:*
youtu.be/_GF6foZxm8M
#RSABridges

HISTORY, MEMORY AND CHANGE

As movements for change sweep across the globe, two of the UK's most admired and engaging public thinkers, historians **Mary Beard** and **David Olusoga**, reflect on the enduring and evolving dialogue between past and present, and the duty we owe to the legacies we inherit.

■ *Watch now:*
youtu.be/BO1A5MMzWzw
#RSABridges



A HEALTHY CONSTITUTION

Achieving global health equity necessitates reworking the terms of international cooperation and the structure of international institutions

by Jennifer Prah Ruger

🐦 @HEPL_equity

In the time it takes to read this article, Covid-19 will have infected a further 2,000 individuals globally. At the time of writing, Covid-19 cases exceed 16 million in over 210 UN countries and territories. Roughly half of the global workforce could have their livelihoods demolished as a result of the pandemic, according to the International Labour Organization.

The pandemic is an unprecedented global scourge, with unquantifiable health, social and economic consequences. It has proven that we are inextricably interdependent and share vulnerabilities. A risk anywhere is a risk everywhere; globalisation has eliminated the barriers that might have impeded the coronavirus from spreading across the Earth with such speed, sickening and killing chaotically. However, the burden of Covid-19 is unequally distributed both within and between nations. Where a person contracts Covid-19 and falls ill determines if they will receive quality care, substandard care, or no care at all, and whether they will fully recover, experience permanent ill effects or die. Healthcare and public health system access and affordability vary significantly across the world, both between countries and within them, with the lack of universal healthcare in some countries creating barriers to access.

This unevenness of access constitutes health inequities – unnecessary and avoidable differences in health – that are unfair and unjust. While the coronavirus itself is a natural hazard, the way the Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged communities worldwide is a man-made disaster.

Warning signs

The world knew a pandemic of this nature was coming, but in spite of this we were not ready. Our lack of preparedness was not inevitable, and it was not due to an inadequate supply of high-level panels, commissions or institutions. Nor was there a dearth of analyses, recommendations or reports. Dozens of reports, published over many years, offered lessons to be learned. These include major reports following the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the 2014 Ebola outbreak, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS; the first outbreak of which was in 2012), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS; a major outbreak of which occurred in 2002), Yellow Fever and Zika, as well as reports on influenza and plague preparedness.

The reports provided forewarnings on many topics, such as the risks to global human health caused by the intersection of animal and human populations (including issues around the poor conditions in which animals are kept, as well as the unceasing human encroachment on animals' natural habitats), systemic vulnerabilities in global supply chains and connectedness, and the importance of developing strong, flexible risk assessments and response plans able to adapt to and contain outbreaks of disease.

There were plenty of harbingers of what was to come. Over the period 2011–18, the World Health Organization (WHO) traced 1,483 epidemic events in 172 countries. Most recently, in its 2019 report, *A World at Risk*, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) warned that the world was at grave risk ▶

Jennifer Prah Ruger is Director of the Health Equity and Policy Lab and the Amartya Sen Professor of Health Equity, Economics and Policy at the University of Pennsylvania



“While the coronavirus is a natural hazard, the way the pandemic has ravaged communities is a man-made disaster”

of a global pandemic like Covid-19. The GPMB was conceived as a result of recommendations by the UN Secretary-General’s Global Health Crises Task Force in 2017. It was set up as an independent monitoring and accountability body whose mission is to ensure preparedness for global health crises. It is co-convened by the World Bank and the WHO.

In its 2019 report, the GPMB concluded that global preparedness and response systems were not sufficient to deal with a highly lethal pandemic. It warned that there was insufficient R&D investment and planning for vaccine development and manufacture, antivirals and non-pharmaceutical interventions. Yet, it offered a note of hope, saying that the world had the tools it needed to react to a pandemic and that “what we need is leadership and the willingness to act forcefully and effectively”.

The world did not take heed. Our international health governance system was inadequate to the charge. But it did not have to be this way.

Crumbling systems

Our global health system is deficient because it is grounded in conventional international-relations theories of realism, neo-realism and liberalism. These paradigms privilege nations as actors seeking to independently maximise national interest by managing distrust, conflict and disorder in international relations.

Our international health system was created for nations to control the spread of infectious disease in order to protect travel, trade, national and global security, and national interest. International agreements constitute bargains that are the result of convergences of independent national interests. If power relations change, or if powerful nations shift positions and lack the ability to strike a deal and hold their nations to it, international agreements will not be implemented. These agreements are unstable, as they are contingent on precarious relationships grounded in power asymmetries and balances rather than on the principles of justice. Nations can abandon an international agreement to pursue their own national interests as soon as any one of them deems that they can position themselves better at others’ expense. This is what is happening with the friction between the US and China, as well as in the latest controversy around vaccine allocation and distribution.

The dispersal of vaccines is likely to be determined by national interest, resulting in competition between nations and steep price fluctuations based on ability and willingness to pay for and secure vaccines. This will favour the rich and powerful, exacerbating existing inequities, and delay getting the pandemic under control. This competitive national-interest-driven approach could even create setbacks in the manufacture of vaccines, as supply chains for drug

development and distribution will be overwhelmed by demand, and redirected to the benefit of richer nations. Hoarding could also be a problem, as seen earlier in the pandemic with respirators and masks, and the purchase by the US of huge supplies of remdesivir (an antiviral medication that has shown promise in combating Covid-19).

Our international institutions and policies reflect the shifting values and priorities of the most powerful nations around the world and are therefore vulnerable to the power relations that underlie them. Powerful national actors determine the legitimacy of the global health system. Politics, rather than science and justice, prevails.

The Covid-19 pandemic has conclusively demonstrated that our international health structures are inadequate for the globalised world. Individuals, societies and economies are increasingly interdependent; people and products move more rapidly worldwide than ever before. Conventional paradigms of international relations, embedded in international institutions and law, have left us fragile and vulnerable. The coronavirus pandemic, like other global health externalities, inequalities and cross-border issues, is a moral and governance failing.

An international consensus on pandemic preparedness, for instance, does not denote a veritable accord and guarantee implementation. Successful pandemic preparedness necessitates that each nation continues to equip and develop its animal, public health and healthcare systems, even if that nation believes it is invulnerable to infectious disease. All nations must collaborate in this project, and the international community must provide the financial support so that less-resourced nations are able to do so. Borders are porous and the weakest link determines the strength of the whole system.

The pandemic has also shown our mutual interdependence and shared vulnerabilities at the local level. For example, by following lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, and adhering to social distancing and mask-wearing rules, we protect ourselves and one another from becoming ill. By contrast, going out in public without wearing a mask, attending large gatherings and continuing to socialise when feeling unwell may cause you to sicken yourself and others. Mutual consideration and cooperation are key.

A moral system of care

Global health problems defy conventional assumptions about international relations. They require a different type of cooperation, one that is global rather than international (meaning its focus is on all people

worldwide, not just nations), and one that involves all actors, not just national actors. By its nature, considering the health of all individuals worldwide is a question of justice. The current state of global health involves an unfair distribution of costs and benefits among morally equal individuals.

Health inequities are rooted in injustices that make some populations more vulnerable to poor health outcomes than others. To eradicate these injustices, we must ask: what do we owe each other when it comes to health?

On the one hand, individuals are sacrificing their own lives for the lives of others, as when frontline health workers treat Covid-19 patients without sufficient personal protective equipment. These sacrifices are injustices in themselves, falling disproportionately on racial and ethnic minorities and individuals in lower income and educational groups. On the other hand, communities are being left to their own devices, such as when nations and sub-national entities compete for necessary counter-measures such as ventilators, masks and test kits, or individuals receive treatment only if they can afford to pay for it.

Global health needs a moral conception, one that is affirmed on moral grounds rather than on the basis of self-interest or national interest. We have a moral obligation to genuinely care for our own health and the health of others and to behave responsibly. We need institutions that represent and serve these common interests.

Our established theoretical frameworks – the aforementioned realism, neo-realism and liberalism, but also neoliberalism and utilitarianism – have fallen short in providing a theoretical grounding for the injustices of global health.

Provincial globalism

An alternative approach, provincial globalism, grounds global health justice in the idea of human flourishing. It builds on the health capability paradigm, which argues that the ability to be healthy – health capabilities – should be the central focus for evaluating justice in health policy, both at the global and national level. This view centres the special moral importance of health capabilities, arguing that humans' ability to flourish is the proper end of social and political activity. This obligation to human flourishing is universal. In provincial globalism, charity and humanitarianism are a deficient basis for achieving health justice because they depend on hand-outs from others rather than empowering collective action to solve societal problems. ▶

Components of health capability are essential to human flourishing. Deprivations in health capability are unjust; they reduce the ability for health functioning, diminish agency and undermine flourishing. Policies that fail to provide for the prevention of and high-quality treatment for Covid-19 are morally troubling because they undercut survival for certain groups. Avoiding premature death and preventable morbidity should claim priority in evaluating global health institutions and policies. This applies to many threats; for example, prenatal and obstetric care for women of colour, malaria prevention in rural settings and tuberculosis treatment in prisons. All human lives deserve respect, and it is incumbent upon us to break down structural barriers to health equity.

Provincial globalism signifies a global view of health capabilities under which the global health community does all it can to achieve a comprehensible set of goals to enhance justice. The importance of health is self-evident and has been a priority of societies for at least the past 3,000 years. In ancient Egypt, healthcare and a form of sick leave were available to workers during the building of the pyramids. As societies and nations grow economically and develop, they tend to pass legislation and establish health systems to guarantee all citizens access to healthcare and financial protection from its costs. Societies eventually come to acknowledge common health needs and seek to meet them, suggesting a transpositional view.

Provincial globalism is a global minimalist view, a mean between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, in which a provincial (national-level) consensus accompanies a global accord on health morality. Human health needs and enhancing health capabilities serve as the basis of claims individuals have upon society. Provincial globalism seeks global health citizenship, such that all persons, wherever they live or travel in the world, will have what they need to protect their health and prevent disease and injury. Global health citizenship signifies global standards of right conduct to promote central health capabilities for all.

Shared health governance should aim to prevent and reduce shortfall inequalities in central health capabilities. It should allocate responsibility both nationally and globally, and its framework should set forth distinct but complementary responsibilities for governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and individuals. Shortfalls in, or threats to, health capabilities measure the justice of global and national institutions, actors, policies and governance. We need to rework the terms of international cooperation and the structure of international institutions to transform our global health system.

Creating new institutions

Despite the current state of global health, cooperation is not incongruent to human nature. Genuine collaboration for common benefit developed in humans because groups that failed to cooperate did not survive. And authentic cooperation is vital to achieving global health justice.

But cooperation requires fairness, which is lacking in our current global health systems. Trust is inhibited by unchecked power inequalities; greater accountability and legitimacy, as well as constraints on power, such as transparent monitoring, would facilitate trust. A Global Health Constitution (GHC) and Global Institute of Health and Medicine (GIHM) could foster cooperation. These structures would represent the interests of all, not just a privileged few. They would specify rules based on the common good. Good governance necessitates regular evaluation of global and national actors and institutions in terms of the common good; a GHC and GIHM would provide the means to do so.

There is at present no world health government with global authority and enforcement powers. The global health system we need would be able to compel multiple actors, executing distinct functions, to solve global health problems by formulating and implementing effective global health policy. A GHC could coordinate these actors, defining obligations in general terms. Unlike a treaty, a GHC would enable relations among people and institutions and reduce or eliminate the influence of powerful nations and actors. Authoritative principles would inform the framework and procedures of a GHC, obligations would be clearly delineated, and evasive or irresponsible behaviour easy to highlight. A GHC would specify functions and establish checks and balances between global health actors, integrating global health work. It would bring clarity, coherence, legitimacy and accountability to formerly ineffective conditions, and generate and limit authority. Without such a structure, the global health community will continue coasting visionless, and will suffer consequences of pressured consensus and exploitation.

A primary task in global health governance is establishing an independent organisation that consults not only its own scientists, but those from external bodies as well as other experts, to be responsible for the objective, authoritative and substantive scientific basis for global health policy. A GIHM could serve this function. It would establish and sustain a network of technical and scientific experts worldwide.

The use and efficacy of scientists and experts thus far in the prevention and control of the Covid-19

“Provincial globalism grounds global health justice in the idea of human flourishing”



pandemic has been profoundly insufficient globally and uneven nationally. The global community needs independent and unbiased expertise; a GIHM would serve this function through a networked approach of technical and scientific experts across the world. It would provide a set of experiments and perspectives from national- and subnational-level institutions, and through GIHM committees would give scientific advice to inform strategic programmatic choices for global health. It would be proactive and directive, rather than reactive and circuitous.

As an entity independent of politics, a GIHM would provide the impartial, objective advice so critically needed to develop and implement more equitable and cost-effective global health policies. It would also give voice to many key stakeholders, not just scientists, in the decision-making process, in the interests of fostering individual and collective health agency.

A GIHM would be responsible for developing a global health master plan. This would make commitments for health policies (for example, universal health coverage for all nations) that would achieve global health equity. These commitments would be evidence-based, objective and explicit. The plan should clearly identify those responsible for objectives based on functional requirements and capabilities. This shared health governance would insulate health and disease control from the narrow

interests of powerful nations and wealthy non-governmental actors.

A healthy world for all

In shared health governance, ensuring that all people have the opportunity to flourish, the common good, is the end goal. A well-organised global society that realises the common good is to everyone’s advantage. The global health system we currently have is tainted by asymmetries in bargaining power, information, expertise and representation, even though these institutions purportedly espouse norms of consensus, fairness and equality. These conditions have not ameliorated persistent deprivation and destitution for people all over the world, in poor and rich countries alike. They did not prepare the world for the coronavirus.

Shared health governance offers an explicit, coherent system for organising health efforts and reducing inefficiency. It calls for minimalist global involvement, with global networks instead drawing on national expertise and scientific prowess, comprehensive national obligations and normative guidance of all actors. Both governance and government must come together in a mutually reinforcing, multi-level system if we are to create a world where all can be healthy. This is the global health system we need. ■

“The end goal is to get people into the culture of listening to one another”

Matthew Taylor discusses Taiwan’s successful approach to the Covid-19 pandemic with Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s Digital Minister

Matthew Taylor: Let me start with a difficult question: how do you think the world could, or should, change after this pandemic?

Audrey Tang: The pandemic is a great amplifier and the world could change to become much more able to solve international-scale issues. For climate change, and other infodemics, we have different timelines, different levels of urgency in different parts of the world. But now, with the pandemic, we are either two months before or two months after every epicentre. There is a much stronger sense of solidarity. The pandemic will amplify the various philosophies around data norms and the norms of governance. For example, in Taiwan we’re a liberal democracy, we believe that data should be jointly controlled by the social sector. We will amplify those tendencies. On the other hand, more authoritarian, even totalitarian, jurisdictions will probably also amplify that tendency.

Taylor: Tell us a little bit about how Taiwan managed its response and why you think it’s been so successful.

Tang: There are three pillars to our response: fast, fair and fun. Fast means that we started responding last year; many jurisdictions only responded this year. Last year, when Dr Li Wenliang, the whistleblower in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), posted on social media that SARS was happening again, it started trending on Taiwanese social media that same day. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) noticed what

was happening, and amplified the messages posted by a person called ‘No More Pipe’, who had posted about Dr Li Wenliang on the Taiwanese equivalent of Reddit. We immediately started screening all passengers and began health inspections for flights from Wuhan to Taiwan; this was on 1 January. This response says that civil society trusts the government enough to talk about new SARS outbreaks and the government trusts us enough to take it seriously.

The fair part ensures that everybody has plenty of medical masks. At the moment, if you are an adult, you get nine rationed masks at a very cheap price every two weeks, 10 if you are a child. And you can purchase additional medical masks if you want because we can now produce 20m medical masks a day. We are also giving them out as international humanitarian aid.

The fun part is about humour versus rumour. Instead of relying on takedowns, we rely on cute spokesdogs and other memetic ways to make sure that clarifications go more viral than conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theory will have an R_0 (reproduction) value of less than one, and our clarification memes, which are very funny, have an R_0 value of above one. That’s how we counter the infodemic part of this pandemic.

Taylor: Taiwan uses technology very extensively and in a way that engages and empowers citizens as innovators and actors within the technological system.

Tang: That’s exactly right. I’ll use two simple technologies to illustrate. One is the telephone and the ▶

Audrey Tang
is Taiwan’s
Digital Minister





“It’s healthy for citizens not to trust government or large corporations”

other is television. These combine together in Taiwan to make sure that everybody who has an idea for the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) can get through to them. The Center holds a live-streamed, televised press conference at 2pm every day; it has done so for more than four months now. They receive calls from the 1922 hotline. Anyone can call this line and see their great idea become tomorrow’s policy at the live press conference.

There was a young boy whose friend called 1922 and said, ‘hey, our boy didn’t want to go to school because all we had is pink medical masks’. The next day, everybody at the CECC press conference, including our health minister, started wearing pink medical masks. Social media painted everything pink. That was to make sure that the message was amplified. With more cases like this, people are much more willing to call 1922 and share their ideas.

Taylor: Does this approach to technology, which combines a commitment to the scope it has to bring about change, but also makes it fun and involves citizens, have deep roots in Taiwanese culture, or is it something that you particularly brought?

Tang: It’s not about me but about the Sunflower Occupy Movement. On 18 March 2014, hundreds

of young activists, most of them college students, occupied Taiwan’s legislature to express their profound opposition to a then new trade pact with Beijing. At that time, the pact was under consideration but in a very secretive manner, and it was being pushed through parliament. The occupation drew widespread public support and afterwards the government promised greater legislative oversight. Before this, if you had asked a random person on the street whether people could participate in day-to-day democracy, whether anybody with a good idea could start an e-petition, or whether there would start to be daily press conferences that take an ask-me-anything attitude, people would look at you like you were crazy.

At the same time, many NGOs deliberated over particular aspects of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA). One particular side of the Occupy movement deliberated about whether we needed to allow PRC so-called market players into the infrastructure of the then new 4G system. The consensus was not to allow PRC components because there are no market players in the PRC, they’re de facto state-owned. That’s why we built our 4G infrastructure without any PRC components.

Taylor: Many people are suspicious towards government and large corporations. As you look

around the world, what do you think other countries are getting wrong?

Tang: You frame people not trusting the government as if it's a problem. It's healthy for citizens not to trust government or large corporations. The government should make itself transparent to citizens, not ask citizens to be transparent to the state. If the government trusts its citizens by making the decision-making process, including the drafting process, available to all to participate in, then, of course, some citizens trust back. But that is not the end goal. The end goal is to get people into the culture of listening to one another, and to build trust between social sector players. That is the true goal of open governance.

Taylor: What about the role of the tech giant? One of the consequences of this crisis will be a further increase in consolidation of power in these corporations.

Tang: We have not rolled out any Bluetooth contact-tracing tool in Taiwan. I'm not denying that these tools are potentially useful if they are open sourced. For example, in Taiwan you can look at the Mask Map app and find pharmacies near you, and see how much medical mask stock they have. Then you can go to the pharmacy and buy masks, and you can see after a couple of minutes, the level of stock decreases on the map. It's real-time accountability and it's powered entirely by open-source technology. Everybody knows that they can hold each other to account. That is the main difference; a culture of people owning not only the technology but also the know-how to build a strong social sector.

Taylor: What do you see as technology's role in relation to renewing democracy?

Tang: Democracy improves as more people participate. Digital technology remains one of the best ways to improve participation as long as the focus is on finding common ground and creating rough consensus. For example, to encourage participation, we use *pol.is*, which is an automated clustering way to find common grounds among ideologically divided people. Or we use an e-petition platform, *join.gov.tw*.

What those technologies have in common, aside from that they're hosted locally and are not part of the commercial cloud, is that they are about taking away the reply button. If you take that away, then there is no room for trolls. This then becomes a pro-social media rather than antisocial media. The way that people interact with each other through technology matters. We always call it assistive intelligence, meaning that

we use some machine learning and other AI tools, but always to assist democracy, not to artificially change the way that the democracy is governed.

It's only when technology is built and controlled by the social sector, and supported but not taken over by the public sector, or the private sector, that the people can truly say that we own the technology, and we're fine with using this to counter Covid-19. For example, we use medical masks as a social signal to say I am not touching my face and I'm going to wash my hands properly. This is social technology. There's no top-down decree of any sort about how to use soap to wash your hands properly or how those social signals should work. Everybody feels that they have a stake in improving our counter-virus tactic; it takes the entire society to come up with a better response.

Taylor: Can you tell us more about the recent major announcement by the Taiwanese government about economic recovery?

Tang: What we've done is what we call the triple coupon: everybody who uses a credit card, an online payment system or a debit card, can spend NT\$3,000 (about £80) starting from mid-July, and then a week afterwards they can go to an ATM and get two-thirds of that back. It's a stimulus package designed to make sure that people go out and spend instead of staying at home and spending via e-commerce.

Taylor: My sense is that for you the future is not about the size of government or the role of government, it's about blurring the boundary between governmental and civic action?

Tang: Exactly. We have not taken coercive action because we've never declared a state of emergency; the constitutional democracy is intact. The reason why the CECC gets a 94% approval rating – not even many totalitarian leaders get that sort of approval rate – is because it is simply reflecting to the civic sector what a social innovator does. That's it. There's no need for criminal penalties for not washing your hands or not keeping physical distance.

The website *taiwancanhelp.us*, which, by the way, is crowdfunded and crowdsourced and is not a government website, shows not only our previous Vice President, Chen Chien-jen, a top epidemiologist, recording a crash anti-Covid-19 course in multiple languages, but also how exactly Taiwan can help. Not only do we think the global collaboration and training frameworks around this are thriving, we are also building a lot of epicentre-to-epicentre relationships. ■

THE POLITICS OF ELDER CARE

Britain urgently needs to develop a new way of funding services for its ageing population

by Nick Timothy
 @NJ_Timothy

Even after all this time, there is much we do not know about Covid-19. But there is one thing we do: it has torn through Britain's care homes without mercy and with little mitigation.

Care homes look after around 3% of our older population, but account for 41% of Covid deaths. There have been around 30,000 excess deaths, compared with the same period last year, in care homes in England and Wales since the pandemic reached our shores, according to the Office for National Statistics. While ministers sought to shield the NHS from the worst of the virus, care homes were left dangerously exposed. Agency workers spread Covid-19 as they moved from care home to care home. Many thousands of care home residents were discharged untested from hospitals into care.

And so tens of thousands of grannies and granddads, mothers and fathers, wives and husbands have been lost to the virus in just a few months. Their passing was not marked by proper funerals, and many died alone, confused and without the dignity they deserved.

We owe it to those who suffered this sad fate not to accept these deaths as an inevitable consequence of the virus. We owe it to them and their loved ones to examine this tragically neglected service and give our elderly the care they need. For our provision of elderly care is a true scandal. Long before Covid-19,

social care was in severe crisis. Without change, the crisis will deepen as our society ages and the demand for care outstrips the supply we are prepared to fund.

An ageing nation

Already, many families find it impossible to get the right care for their elderly relatives. Carers struggle to deal with fragmented services that are underfunded and overwhelmed by demand. And, of course, there is little point in prioritising the NHS if social care is neglected, because hospitals that cannot discharge patients to care homes end up overcrowded themselves.

Academic research prepared for the government shows that demand for social care will grow rapidly over the next 20 years. In England, the number of people aged 65 and above will rise by 54%, from 9.7 million in 2015 to 14.9 million in 2040. The number of people aged 85 and above will grow even faster, by 109%, from 1.3 million in 2015 to 2.7 million in 2040.

Many will be vulnerable and need care. The government has been advised that the number of older people who depend on home care services or direct payments will increase by 87%, from 249,000 in 2015 to 466,000 in 2040. The number of older people in local authority residential care will rise by 67%, from 157,000 in 2015 to 262,000 in 2040.

Nick Timothy was joint Chief of Staff to Theresa May. His book, *Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism*, is out now



And, of course, this will come at a significant price. Public spending on social services for older people is projected to rise from around £7.2bn in 2015 to £18.7bn in 2040. So what can we do?

Taking action

Trying to answer this question cost me my job. The failure by Theresa May to win a majority in 2017 was blamed, by some, on the social care policy we proposed in the Conservative manifesto I wrote. Many other things went wrong in that election campaign, but I resigned as joint Chief of Staff in Downing Street because our social care proposal blew up the manifesto.

But as Covid-19 has shown, the social care crisis is getting worse, and inaction is no longer viable. We urgently need to find a way of funding social care, and we must reform the way it is provided so it is efficient, fair and compassionate.

Not every policy fix comes at great cost. We can create financial incentives for families to renovate their homes so they can look after relatives. We can recognise carers through transferable tax allowances and council tax rebates. We can, as the Tory MP Danny Kruger has suggested, find ways to reward informal domiciliary carers from the local community.

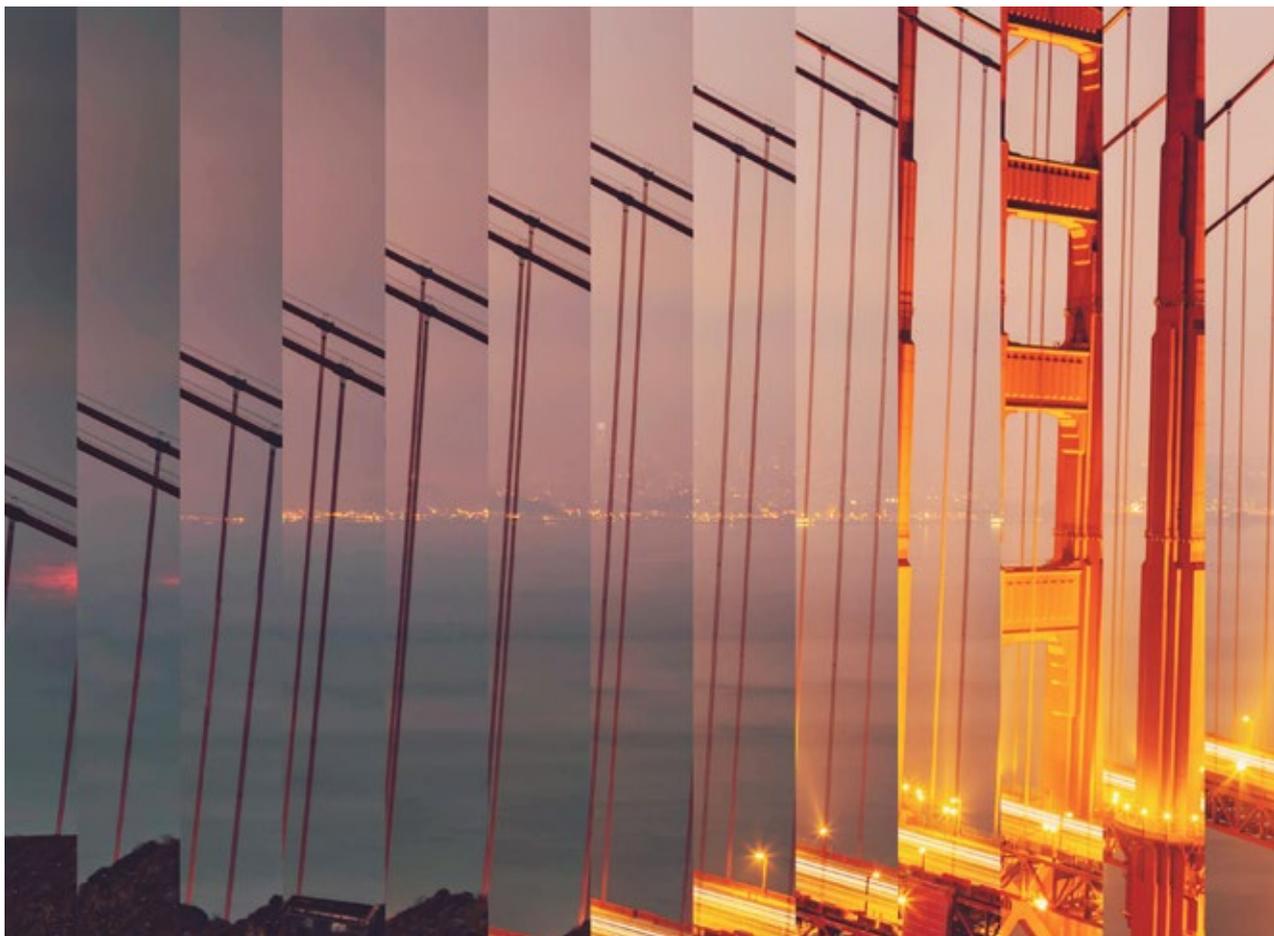
But ultimately, for professional and specialist care, we are going to need to find a way of funding

the system and making it work better. The most important priorities are to make sure there is a better interaction between the NHS and care homes, high-quality provision that is genuinely available across the country, and a better-trained, better-paid and better-motivated workforce.

On funding, there are no easy solutions. In the short to medium term, an insurance model will do nothing to help those who are already beyond middle age, and younger people – already struggling to afford their own home, bring up children and save for a pension – will find it difficult to pay insurance premiums, whether voluntary or not.

It will be asking too much of younger workers, too, to fund social care – along with higher overall pension and NHS costs – through huge hikes in taxes on income or day-to-day spending. The only remaining choice, then, is to pay for social care by taxing accumulated wealth after death. We can do that by raising more funds through inheritance tax, or by levying a social care tax on our estates after we die. This would, unlike the 2017 proposal, pool risk and share costs across society as a whole.

Such details, of course, reflect choices still to be made, but there is one choice that can be delayed no longer: the social care crisis is real and it must be confronted. ■



A HOPEFUL RECOVERY?

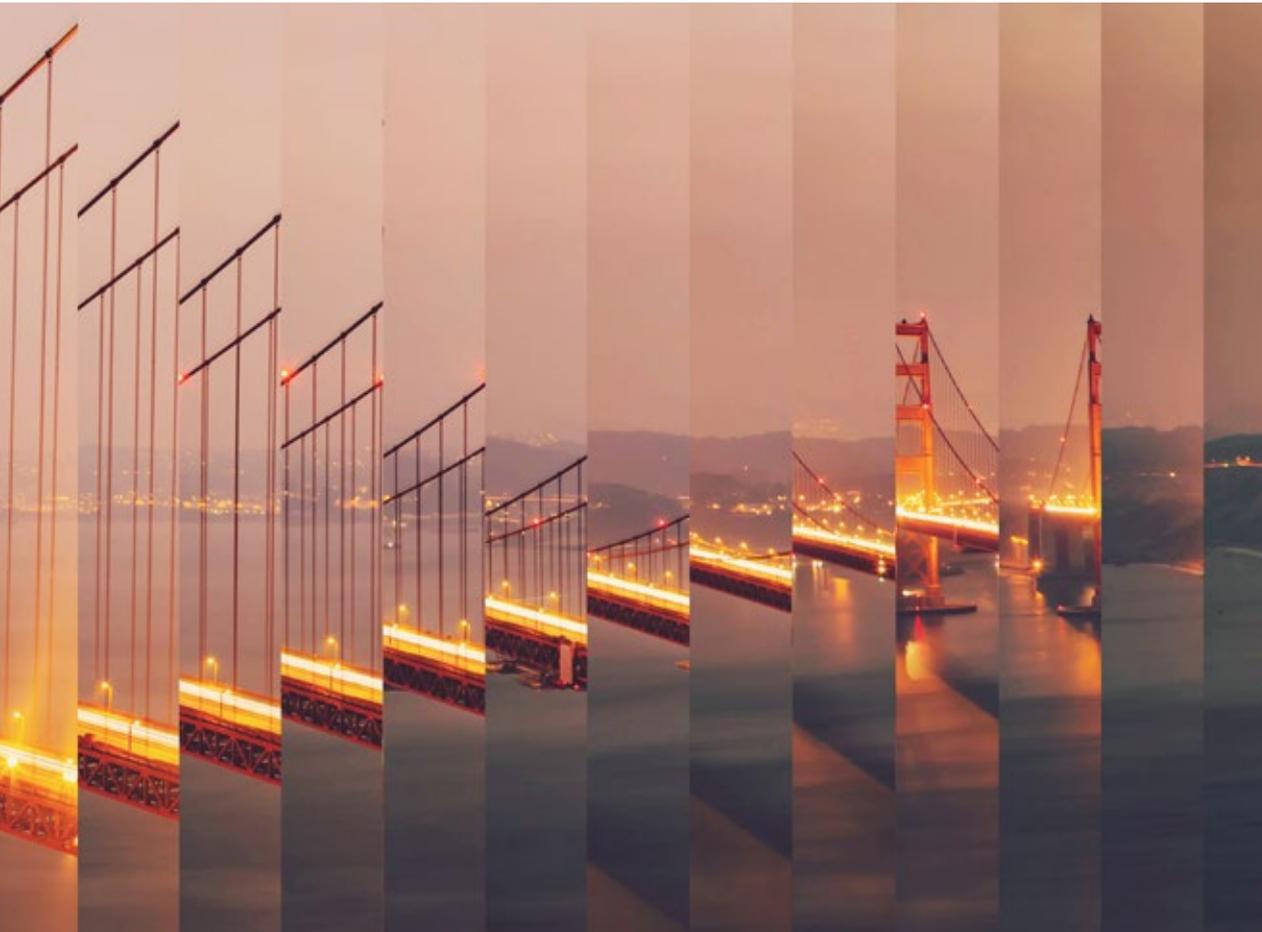
As we move out of lockdown, now is the chance to take stock of society's vulnerabilities and work for a better future

by Anthony Painter
🐦 @anthonypainter

Anthony Painter is the RSA's Chief Research and Impact Officer

In the space of a few short months, Covid-19 has brutally exposed the fragile nature of our lives and societies. It has reduced each of us to our vulnerable cores, forcing us to look at our own individual lives, as well as wider society, and to ask hard questions. This realisation has set in motion a silent – for now – psychological revolution. Knowledge of our vulnerability, the adjustments we make and our response to rebuilding society once the pandemic

has passed will set the course for future generations. Although we are encouraged to believe that the individual is paramount, our dependence on one another, on families, communities, neighbourhoods and the state, has never been clearer. We are all experiencing vulnerability; while this is unevenly distributed, the interlinked nature of our lives means that none of us is free from fragility. Can we turn that interdependence and the reminder of the



deep inequalities that preceded the pandemic into energy for the renewal we need? As a response to the unprecedented times we find ourselves in, and in an attempt to direct some of this energy positively, the RSA rapidly developed its Bridges to the Future thinking in the early phase of the pandemic. We have brought together leaders, experts and Fellows to share ideas about how we can build a better future and create the change that our society so clearly needs. Our Bridges to the Future work recognises the precariousness many of us are now experiencing. Through a series of blogs, articles, reports and online events, we have encouraged people to imagine a better future together and to set in motion the change needed to get there.

Disrupted lives

For the young person in the city just starting out in life, trying to build their career and personal relationships but living in shared accommodation and now finding themselves without a job, the experience of precarity has been real. Grandparents, some isolated and at risk, wonder when they will next see their grandchildren, quietly anxious, knowing they are losing precious

time. Young families wrestle with childcare and remote work, suddenly finding that they are not just professionals and parents, but teachers too.

Then there is the furloughed worker, with a secure (for now) income and plenty of time. Who could complain? Well, those seeming benefits are not going to last forever. Does furlough now mean redundancy next, to line up alongside an army of 4 or 5 million unemployed?

What of the artist and performer sat alone at home unable to continue with their chosen career, their income gone and the prospects of it returning in the foreseeable future very low? Because they ran their finances through a company, they were not eligible for Self-Employment Income Support. From a rich social, expressive and creative existence to Universal Credit and walking the dog in the blink of an eye.

Key workers carry on, under often intolerable circumstances, tending the sick and frail, ensuring we have food and essentials, transporting us and making sure that the courts stay open, the lights turn on, the bins are emptied and the gas boiler lights. Working long hours, many must also contend with worries about childcare and care for other family members ▶



“Covid-19 has not just exposed health vulnerabilities; it has also shone a light on wider pre-existing inequalities”

and neighbours, as well as very real fears about their own health. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, many healthcare and transport workers have died of Covid-19, with a disproportionate number of these deaths among BAME communities. And yet, key workers keep on going, even running on empty.

For the young secondary school student, the first few weeks of lockdown were great fun; freed from the confines of the school day and able to relax in a perpetual weekend. Yet, as the weeks turned into months, what about those students who had relied on the emotional support of teachers and the school environment? The unstructured days stretch far ahead; motivation and support are harder to find. Those for whom home is not a safe place may be struggling without the structure of the education system.

Multi-generational families that live together and have had to continue to work through the pandemic have each other but also experience a collective fear. And again, for families from ethnic minority backgrounds, the evidence is that they are being hit disproportionately harder by the pandemic. When grandmother goes out for her twice-weekly walk, she wears a mask: but why are so few others doing the same?

And what about those who are re-entering lockdown? At the time of writing, that was the lot of the citizens of Leicester, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, but

when you read this I imagine other locales will have had to reintroduce lockdown rules; perhaps there is a second national lockdown. The uncertainty of what even the immediate future holds will weigh on people who find themselves in this situation: one reason the RSA’s Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor, and I called for a “year of stabilisation” with clear and sustainable policies on education, work, and community and income support.

Worsening faultlines

Covid-19 has not just exposed health vulnerabilities; it has also shone a light on wider pre-existing inequalities and discrimination. When a police officer – with his colleagues passively looking on – killed George Floyd in the US in May, it set in motion protests against police brutality that continue to this day. This is not the first time Black Lives Matter protests have taken place, but these are the most well-attended and widespread protests yet. People have taken to the streets even while the pandemic rages on. On the surface, police brutality and a major health crisis are not related, but as we are seeing, it is the same systems of inequality that have meant that certain sections of society are more affected by both. George Floyd himself had been laid off from his job in Minnesota’s night-time economy due to lockdown. A population already under the immense stress caused

by dealing with a pandemic and economic insecurity reached its breaking point in a video of a Black man being callously killed by a police officer. As a pastor friend describes it, the US has weaponised the rule of law while criminalising poverty.

Vulnerability has always been with us, but not since the Second World War have vast swathes of the population experienced it to any great degree. But if you are poor, from a minority ethnic group, or suffer from health conditions, either physical or mental, you have always known what vulnerability is. Now, that experience is universal; although, still, not evenly distributed, both at the national and international levels. The weakness of governance systems and national resilience has been exposed in the UK and US – “flailing states”, as Pankaj Mishra describes them – but also in countries as diverse as Sweden, India and Brazil. Rich countries have struggled with the impacts of the pandemic; as it spreads through the developing world, we can expect these effects to be even more devastating. Crumbling healthcare systems, high levels of poverty and the prevalence of other life-threatening diseases will all magnify the direct and indirect impacts of Covid-19. The disease takes advantage of vulnerabilities; with more weak points, developing countries have more fires to fight.

Expanding the lifeworld

Vulnerability is experienced as psychological pain and it derives from our political, material, social and biological relationships with the world outside of us. These relationships can either be measured objectively (for example, income, or physical condition) or experienced as anxieties or a sense of powerlessness. Vulnerability and insecurity are closely related, as they share these material and psychological characteristics.

It is worth saying something about the notion of the ‘lifeworld’. Within the lifeworld we realise ourselves, we craft a space to call our own. While this arena might be private, it is far from asocial. Within this space we develop our sense of self throughout life, but we also build our relationships of affection and trust, of caring and sharing. Our lifeworlds are fragile. In a recent edition of *RSA Journal*, I outlined how the health of our lifeworlds is dependent upon how we interact with systems of power, money, technology and ecology. When the values of the lifeworld are supported and reflected in these systems that make, shape and sometimes break us, then our lives can flourish and thrive. But when money, power and technology create psychological, material and physical insecurities, they accentuate self-doubt rather than wellbeing.

We should be expanding the ethic of the lifeworld into these systems, but too often the opposite has

happened: these impersonal systems have encroached on our lives, with dire consequences. Persistent and spreading economic insecurity; a politics of expressive assertion that divides rather than unites; a relationship with technology which relies too heavily on the tools of manipulation, addiction and harm; and the reshaping of the planet’s ecology around production at all costs all exemplify the ways in which money, power and technology have been misused to significant detrimental effect. It has been one of the aims of our Bridges to the Future work to look for ways in which we can dismantle some of our acquisitive systems and rebuild them to be more inclusive, sustainable and founded in equality.

Courage, compassion and connection

The acceptance of vulnerability and its consequences is key to forging the path ahead. Brené Brown, an American professor known in particular for her work on vulnerability, has articulated three components of healthy engagement with vulnerability: courage, compassion and connection. These are a good guide to the type of society we want to evolve.

Courage involves accepting that vulnerability is not reserved for the unfortunate few, but is part of all our lives. We all need protection. At the core of this realisation is recognition of both the fact that we are all in this together, but also that the load and risk is unequally shared. Institutions should provide support and protection for all, but greater support for the most vulnerable. For example, for students facing educational disadvantage this means meshing together more tightly an array of educational, community and public services to provide constant support. The RSA’s Pinball Kids project is seeking to do just this to enable earlier intervention for pupils at risk of exclusion.

And over the pond, our RSA US colleagues have demonstrated courage and shown the importance of connection by challenging the system of mass incarceration in the US in the aftermath of George Floyd’s killing. It is a debate we need in the UK too, and the RSA could well revisit its previous work on relational policing and rehabilitative criminal justice. We have recently highlighted the increasingly extensive use of AI-powered surveillance systems by UK police forces and the likely racially biased impact of these technologies: another example of systems of power and technology interacting in ways that exacerbate, rather than reduce, vulnerability.

Since the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, health and social care services have shown an exceptional ability to mobilise and adapt. Yet enormous weaknesses have been exposed in the cracks between health and social care, between public services and private

supply, between the ability to encourage volunteering at scale and using volunteers effectively. The RSA has recommended a People's Health and Care Commission to the government, partly based on citizens' assemblies, to help explore how the technological determinants of health – such as medicines, data analysis, individualised treatment (not least through genomics) and more resilient supply chains – interact with the social determinants of health, which are shared, based on caring relationships and deeply personal. Such a renewed system would be grounded in compassion and human relationships and connection, safeguarded by involving citizens in designing the deep ethical code of the health and social care services of the future.

As Alan Lockey, Head of the RSA's Future Work Centre, explored in one of our Bridges to the Future essays, occupations that may have been poorly paid but certain, such as in hospitality and retail, have been turned on their head by the pandemic. A universal basic income, which the RSA has been proposing for some time, would provide a baseline of economic security for all, and would be most valuable for those whose circumstances are most precarious. Allowing workers to access their data so they understand

how they may be monitored and judged; stronger, more flexible training; and support for innovations in worker representation and voice could further enhance the economic security and quality of work for all, and especially for the most vulnerable.

As it is for people, so it is for places. Analysis undertaken in the early aftermath of the lockdown by the RSA Future Work Centre showed the differential level of unemployment risk within different places based upon their occupational structure. Those places most reliant on the tourist or seasonal economy have suffered the most. Localities need the tools, resources and powers to respond to their own idiosyncratic needs. A powering up, alongside a levelling up, will be necessary in the coming months and years.

The RSA's Regenerative Futures programme, designed by Josie Warden and Rebecca Ford, is considering how to develop circular local economies where local supply, economic opportunity and environmental sustainability are embedded in economic and democratic structures. Can ethical local supply systems compete with just-in-time global supply chains? With the right collective leadership, support for innovation and capacity-building we believe they can. Critical to developing local capacity is the re-capitalisation of local economies. That is why we have suggested democratic local coordination of grant, loan, equity and philanthropic investment. Local Investment and Finance Trusts could be created, with one purpose being the capitalisation of community banks, with local funds matched by endowments from the government or Bank of England.

Cultivating a nurturing future

These are just some of the proposals we have suggested as the pandemic has evolved. Ultimately, there are thousands of good ideas and the RSA's contribution is not designed to come up with all the solutions or all the right answers. Instead, we will seek to collaborate ever more deeply with RSA Fellows, major partners in civil society, key figures in the business world, those in positions of political or policy leadership and, crucially, those directly impacted by the insecurity-generating aspects of big systems. We seek to nourish "ordinary virtues", as Julian Sheather described them in his recent RSA essay, which encourage us to cooperate and regulate our selfishness. The search for ideas, innovations, new narratives and movements that can acquire enough energy to sustain deep reform over the longer term is on. In his essays that form part of the Bridges to the Future series, Matthew Taylor argues that ordinary virtues and new forms of leadership – that own and navigate tensions rather than ignoring or simply slicing through them – make deep reform

RSA Fellowship in action

Mearns Kirk Helping Hands

Mearns Kirk Helping Hands, a volunteer-led charity based in East Renfrewshire that aims to improve health and wellbeing in the local community and reduce loneliness and isolation, has been awarded a £2,000 RSA Catalyst Seed Grant. This will be used to support the charity's IT Tablets for Beginners course, which helps older people to develop computer literacy skills and is now operating remotely.

The award was granted through the fast-track Catalyst round launched to help Fellows' projects that are responding to the Covid-19 crisis. "We wanted to be able to carry on providing that learning opportunity to people when they couldn't get out and about," said Vicky Attwood, Mearns Kirk Helping Hands' Project Manager. Tablets are loaded with relevant software and delivered to people's homes, where they then receive several weeks of tutoring via Zoom.

Mearns Kirk Helping Hands offers many other activities and meet-ups for locals, such as a dementia support group and a Friendship Club. "Going forward, we're looking to start providing a face-to-face, one-to-one befriending service, which we haven't up until now. We think there'll be a real need for that," said Vicky.

■ To find out more about Mearns Kirk Helping Hands, visit mkhelpinghands.org.uk or email hello@mkhelpinghands.org.uk



“Courage involves accepting that vulnerability is not reserved for the unfortunate few, but is part of all our lives”

more likely. We hope that the RSA can be a relentlessly positive partner for many in collectively cultivating a future that is nurturing of all our lifeworlds.

Time for political change

We do not yet know how Covid-19 will shape our politics and society. The hope is that the lessons learnt during the pandemic – about how interlinked we all are, and how we should treat the most vulnerable members of society – will feed through into a politics that will consider how we might create more space for security, creativity and wellbeing, and less for vulnerability, anxiety and insecurity. The worry is that politics will be guided by negatives, playing on our fears and turning us against the ‘other’, further entrenching the positions of the most vulnerable and most advantaged. Or we may just muddle through, stuck and insecure.

We should aim for a hopeful politics. Generous rather than ideologically pure, experimental and humble, seeking to build alliances between different value sets. Yet, we see divides between radical and liberal accounts of progress, with some wanting to see radical shifts of power, others wanting to seek careful, considered change. The pace of change matters: radicalism risks reaction; gradualism risks fatalism in the face of

enormous existential challenges, most notably climate change. Conservatism is divided between its liberal and radical wings; given the recent electoral success of the latter in the UK and US, the challenge is to respond in a substantive way to the vulnerabilities we face. Will the US electorate impose the penalty of defeat on President Trump for extraordinary levels of incompetence over Covid-19? And can the populist right learn greater governing competence as part of the statecraft equation? On these questions rests the right’s relevance over the course of the next decade.

There is something that unifies the characters I outlined at the start of this piece. They all face vulnerabilities, albeit in many different forms and with different degrees of intensity. Power is distant; the system of money has been captured, generating deep inequalities; technology often feels more like it is shaping society than being shaped by society; and there is awareness of an impending climate emergency, even if the urgency of response is not quite there yet. All of this may seem overwhelming. If we sink into despair, if we are seduced by divisive narratives that separate us and stoke conflict, then the insecurities and vulnerabilities only increase. With courage, compassion and connection there is a more hopeful way, and we hope that we can explore it together. ■

COVID-19 AND CHANGING HABITS

Behavioural economics can help to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but only if its recommendations are based on scientific evidence

by Fadi Makki

🐦 @makkifadi

Covid-19 does not – to date – have a viable preventive vaccine or cure. Until it does, the only solution available to limit its spread is, by and large, behavioural. And, as insights from behavioural science demonstrate, matters of individual behaviour are intriguing and complex, particularly so at a time of great stress and uncertainty. Behavioural economics takes account of people’s bounded rationality, as well as other cognitive laminations that affect decision-making. If we are to successfully respond to the pandemic, it is essential that we understand the behavioural roots of compliance, prevention and containment measures. Behavioural economics and related fields have been instrumental in providing a better, more realistic understanding of why people – individuals and groups – behave the way they do. It provides a key departure from the prevailing assumption in economic theories that human beings are rational agents.

One size fits all?

As has been observed in the US, Brazil and Mexico, among other countries, the response to Covid-19 has been laidback. This has led to an underestimation of the risk of contracting and spreading the disease, not to mention tragic mortality rates. This response was, in part, driven by cognitive biases such as optimism bias and overconfidence. A by-product of overconfidence is the planning fallacy; this means we underestimate our ability to affect future outcomes and the resources required to achieve a task, often neglecting the role of chance and ignoring past experience.

At the other end of the spectrum, the policy adjustments by governments in response to global dynamic social norms were interesting to observe.

Some governments of developing countries, such as India and Egypt, opted to enact the same measures taken by developed and industrialised countries (such as nationwide shutdowns), as an off-the-shelf approach, without assessing the specific impacts on their people and economies. Despite their lockdowns, both these countries failed to contain the spread of the virus. The consequences show that, when applying behavioural insights to public policy, context matters.

Forming new habits

Behavioural science has taken on particular importance in light of the recent discourse around two concepts that influenced the early stages of the UK’s policy response to Covid-19: first, that a slow and calculated herd immunity level was desirable to prevent the disease from spreading further; and second, that public compliance with social distancing measures might diminish over time if started too early. The latter, known as behavioural fatigue, was emphatically promoted by the UK government’s behavioural science advisers, but questioned by many others in the field for not being evidence-based. The incident exemplifies the importance of managing expectations and clarifying roles when using behavioral science, particularly in such a high-stakes situation.

Behavioural science should facilitate implementation of expert-driven solutions; its role is not to independently craft a particular health policy solution. It has a plethora of tools and methods that are important for tackling policy challenges through a behavioural lens and adopting and testing solutions. Behavioural mapping is one such tool. It utilises quantitative and qualitative evidence to identify the psychological biases and situational bottlenecks that

Fadi Makki leads the first nudge unit in the Middle East, B4Development (formerly known as the Qatar Behavioural Insights Unit), and is the founder of Nudge Lebanon



could impede a desired outcome. By breaking down the behavioural challenges into stages and identifying who will be affected and how, policymakers can more easily tackle a problem at the root.

Insights from behavioural science can be of paramount importance in helping to make certain behaviours stick. For instance, behavioural science analysis has shown that people comply with prevention strategies when compliance is easy. If hand sanitisers are placed prominently in public places, people are more likely to use them. Utilising social disapproval is also important, as is promoting a public-spirited attitude. Presenting compliance as a strategy that is ‘best for everyone’, and developing information campaigns that are simple, pragmatic, empathetic and understanding have all been found to increase compliance.

Behavioural approaches should be tested and evaluated to ensure that only those which are found to be successful and sustainable are implemented. The focus should be on bringing experimentation to the forefront of policymaking, ideally through randomised controlled trials (RCTs). While RCTs – the golden standard for behavioural economics and related fields – remain the cornerstone, there are numerous low-cost methods that allow us to test what

works. This is particularly important in times of a pandemic, where we do not have the luxury to conduct extended experimentation, and must instead settle for small pilots, from which we learn and re-adapt to the changing environment. The focus should be on adding experimentation elements to the emergency response and using quasi-experimental evaluation methods (which require minimal informational and personnel requirements) for rapid assessments.

At this time of societal transformation, adoption of behavioural science tools and methods at the governmental and organisational levels are most likely to produce successful results. Introducing ‘choice architecture’ interventions (nudges that encourage people to make certain decisions but allow them to retain sovereignty) in a timely fashion at key moments can have the greatest impact on increasing the uptake of new behaviours and sustaining them. The increased adoption of behavioural science will encourage the field to evolve further, and we will start to see the integration of its precepts into other areas, including artificial intelligence and other applications that rely on big data. However, this might also increase the risk of potential misuse. It is crucial that adequate ethics codes are enforced as safeguards. ■

SOCIAL SUFFERING

To tackle mental distress in the time of Covid-19 we must go beyond clinical approaches; we must first address structural inequalities

by Nikolas Rose

🐦 @rose_nikolas

During the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, our lives have been discombobulated, our habits thrown into confusion, our news filled with images of suffering and death, our lives confined and constrained as never before, our futures thrown into doubt. We are anxious, sad, worried, miserable, angry, scared, exhausted, stir crazy, lonely, troubled, distressed, perturbed, apprehensive, occasionally dejected, sometimes scared by enforced isolation and the evaporation of social support, and, in some cases, terrified as our meagre financial resources melt away before our eyes. But somehow this language of the emotions is not enough. What people are experiencing, it seems, are problems of mental health.

The newspapers are full of stories about those struggling with mental health problems, charities and experts offer advice on how to manage our mental health during the pandemic, exercise gurus frame their injunctions to stretch, jump and run as good for mental health, not just for physical fitness. Every day, it seems, there is a new article in the press warning that we are facing a pandemic of mental disorders. Survey after survey appears to show that large numbers of people are experiencing symptoms of poor mental health, such as anxiety and depression. Researchers propose even more surveys, more screening for mental health problems, and easier access to clinicians for drugs and specialised treatment.

Our children too are at risk; they are not, as we might have thought, thrilled to be liberated from the schoolroom: experts predict permanent damage to their mental health. An open letter signed by more than 100 psychology, mental health and neuroscience specialists urged government ministers to release

children from lockdown so that they could enjoy the benefits of school for their endangered mental health. They join many others in demanding a radical increase in child and adolescent psychological services.

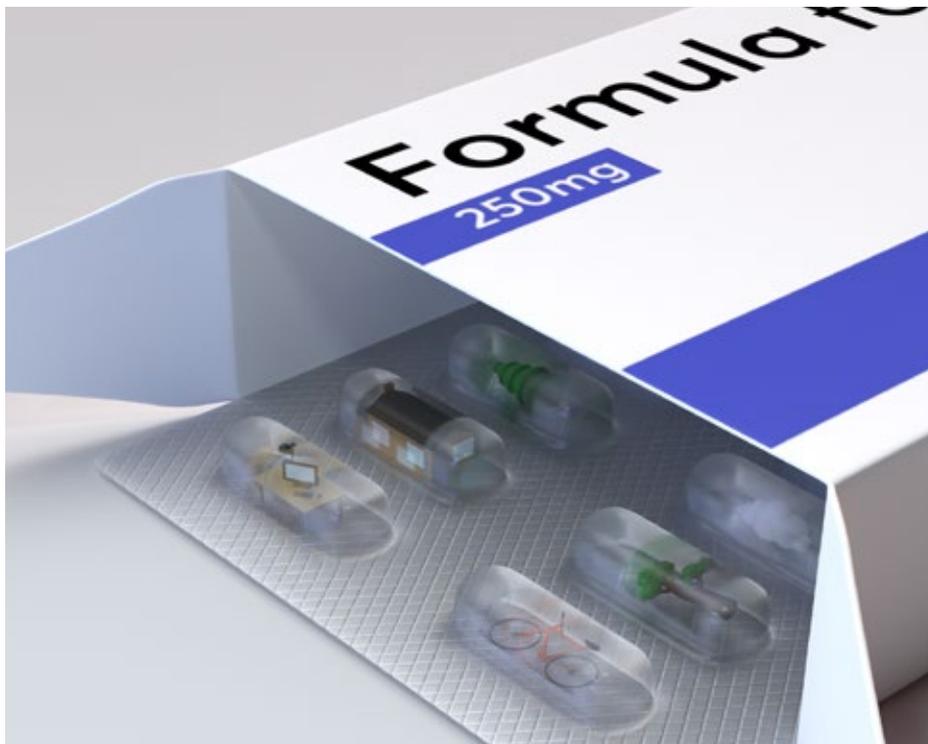
A multi-authored position paper (Holmes et al) in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, published in April 2020, already highly cited, calls for action from “mental health science” to collect high-quality data on the mental health effects of the pandemic on “brain function, cognition, and mental health for patients with Covid-19” to help develop “mechanistically driven interventions to address the psychological, social, and neuroscientific aspects of the pandemic”. It seems more research, and more research funding, is a priority. From a different perspective, well-known psychotherapists and specialists in trauma and grief counselling interviewed for *The Guardian* predict long-term consequences – recurrent panic attacks, overwhelming anxiety, troubling flashbacks – especially for those with past experiences of trauma. It seems post-pandemic psychotherapy will be in great demand.

Stay alert, be aware

Thanks to the prominence given to stories about mental health in the media, the predictions of experts equipped with their surveys and scales, and the efforts of mental health campaigns, such as the annual Mental Health Awareness Week, we are now ‘aware’ of mental health problems as never before. Who, today, could be against mental health ‘awareness’? Who could dispute the stress encountered on a daily basis by health workers forced to practise in exhausting and dangerous conditions without protective clothing, caring for many sick, and dying, ▶

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“Covid-related mental distress must be addressed by tackling its social roots”

patients? Who could doubt the pressures experienced by those isolated in cramped living spaces, juggling the demands of children and domestic responsibilities, facing the threat of unemployment, struggling with uncaring benefit systems and often facing the very real threat of penury? Who can fail to worry about the fate of frontline workers who continue to empty bins, make deliveries and perform other essential services? And yet, are these ‘mental health’ problems?

Is the language of mental health here virtuous ‘awareness’: a sign that we are aware at last of the true nature of these feelings and experiences? Or is it an example of what Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking termed “looping”; a spiral of identification and identity formation? Despondency, apprehension, unease, uncertainty and the manifold troubles of making our collective lives in a socially unjust world are being re-coded by experts and individuals as problems of individual mental health to be quantified by mental health researchers, diagnosed using psychiatric categories and treated by mental health professionals. But rather than more and more of us being turned into ‘suitable cases for treatment’, I think we need an alternative approach.

Past experience has shown that most human beings are more robust in the face of collective dangers and disasters than suggested by all these predictions from experts. This is not because of individual psychological traits; evidence shows that resilience in the face of

crises emerges in situations of high social solidarity. But evidence also suggests that the most serious and enduring problems will be borne disproportionately by those already experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage resulting from social, gender, racial and geographical inequalities. Yet policies to deal with Covid-19 have been largely socially blind. We knew that those in dilapidated housing, in polluted environments, with inadequate hygiene facilities would be less able to avoid contracting the disease. We knew that they would often be unable to work from home, and would not be able to isolate those showing symptoms in a (non-existent) spare room. We knew that those on zero-hours contracts, where no work equals no pay, who have no financial savings to draw upon, would have to continue using public transport, placing them at further risk of contracting the virus. We knew that failure to act on this evidence would exacerbate disadvantages and intensify inequalities. To have ignored such basic knowledge from the social sciences is inexcusable. To refer to the feelings and experiences of those in these exposed situations as ‘mental health problems’ is not only disingenuous, it is to individualise both the experiences and the responses to them.

Structural violence

It is routine to pay lip-service to the social determinants of mental health. But what our fellow citizens

are experiencing here is actually what Kleinman, Das and Lock describe as “social suffering”: the embodied consequences of the experience of multiple disadvantages grounded in structural social inequality. This is what Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung has called “structural violence”, the consequences of the economic, political and legal structures, and gender discrimination and racism, that impair the extent to which individuals can reach their potential. These inequalities have become so embedded in our forms of life that they are usually normalised and invisible.

American medical anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer, who is well known for his tireless advocacy for policies to address the diseases of poverty in the Global South, has put the issue most clearly. In an influential paper, “Structural violence and clinical medicine”, he and his colleagues argued that the predictable and preventable consequences of such structural violence on physical and mental health require responses that go far beyond those of clinical medicine, to tackle the biosocial and ecosocial conditions that cause them.

From this perspective, rather than seeking to ‘diagnose’ these experiences using crude scales that translate distress into symptoms and scores into psychiatric diagnoses, we should make a ‘formulation’. A formulation seeks to render a person’s distress intelligible in terms of the challenges of living a life in particular circumstances, and to respond by addressing those challenges. While medication might be used to provide temporary relief, this approach requires us to seek solutions to matters such as poverty, debt, inadequate welfare benefits and domestic abuse. It requires mental health professionals to work with others to (re)build both formal and informal networks of social support. It could mean psychiatrists campaigning for the transformation of the pathogenic and obesogenic material environments that underpin many of these difficulties.

To recognise that these are problems of social suffering and structural violence is not to overdramatise them. This is the inequitable everyday suffering of disadvantaged people and families, especially – but not only – from among Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations. Even in tough circumstances, human lives contain hopes, pleasures and even satisfactions despite adversity. Informal networks of friends and neighbours, local religious organisations and mutual aid groups play a crucial role. But much of the basic infrastructure of community life that supports capabilities – such as libraries, and youth and community centres – has been decimated by a decade of austerity and privatisation. It is no surprise to social scientists that, belatedly, the

disproportionate consequences of Covid-19 on those living in these conditions is being recognised, if not adequately explained.

Pulling up by the roots

Social suffering and structural violence will only be exacerbated as we live through the economic consequences of this crisis, which, once again, will fall hardest on those who have least in terms of financial and social resources. Some may need access to professional mental health services, and we certainly need an immediate and sustained reversal of years of underfunding of such services in the community. But for most, Covid-related mental distress must be addressed by tackling its social roots. Governments must pump back funds into local authorities to enable them to reconstitute community services, and must channel resources to community organisations, peer support and mutual aid networks to enable them to rebuild.

In the face of pandemic-related unemployment, action is necessary to tackle discrimination in the employment market and in workplaces and to regulate the gig economy so that those already facing precarity and racism are not further disadvantaged. Central governments must guarantee genuine equal access to universal healthcare, to provide free and accessible public transport, to replace highly conditional benefit systems with something like a universal basic income, and to ensure that all economic and social policies are subjected to a legally binding mental health audit.

This may sound unfeasibly expensive, but the social and economic costs, not to mention the costs in personal and community suffering, far outweigh the costs of such interventions. While clinical care and mental health services are indispensable, the aims of all those concerned with mental health in the time of Covid-19 should be to work with national and local politicians, policymakers, planners, architects, local groups and those who have experienced mental health services to address the roots of social suffering and structural violence. The aim should be not only to provide the conditions under which people have the capabilities to control their lives within the fluctuating material, social and economic circumstances they inhabit, but to enable them to challenge and transform those circumstances. To have the chance, at least, to become the kinds of people they would like to be. ■

■ This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council under grant ES/S012567/1. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the ESRC, the Centre, or King’s College London



CLEANING UP FAST FASHION

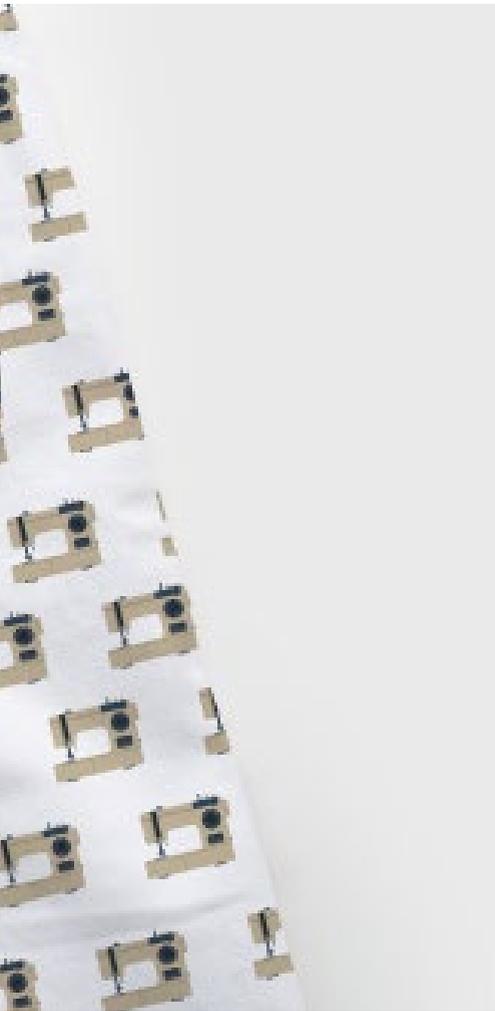
What are the consequences of our appetite for low-cost clothing?

by Kieran Breen
🐦 @LeicsCares

Kieran Breen has worked in development in Africa, Latin Central and North America, and the UK. He is currently the CEO of Leicestershire Cares and lectures on youth and global issues at De Montfort University

At the time of writing, the city and suburbs of Leicester were under local lockdown due to a spike in Covid-19 cases, with allegations that this was linked to some garment factories that had not only continued to operate as the pandemic took hold, but also increased their workforce without protecting them. These events throw a light on exploitative work practices that have persisted for years and underline the importance of the RSA's Regenerative Futures work, which explores the potential for a more sustainable fashion industry.

Anti-Slavery International, a non-governmental organisation, defines modern slavery as “the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain”. The International Labour Organization and the Walk Free Foundation (WFF) estimate that worldwide there are 40 million modern slaves: 71% are women and girls and 25% are children. The WFF Global Slavery Index 2018 estimated the number of victims of modern slavery in the UK at 136,000.



According to Anti-Slavery International, “Migrant workers are targeted because they often don’t speak the language, have few friends, have limited rights and depend on their employers. Forced labour happens in the context of poverty, lack of sustainable jobs and education, as well as a weak rule of law, corruption and an economy dependent on cheap labour.”

Unprotected workers

In 2015, the Ethical Trading Initiative commissioned research from the Centre for Sustainable Work and Employment Futures of the University of Leicester into the growing UK garment and textile industry. The report, written by Dr Nik Hammer, draws on interviews with a wide range of stakeholders in the UK garment and textiles sector, including retailers, suppliers, manufacturers and workers. Focusing on Leicester, it found that many workers in the worst factories were earning around £3 per hour (compared with a then National Minimum Wage

of £6.50). It highlighted that workers (mostly from migrant communities) were being subjected to verbal abuse, bullying, threats and humiliation, as well as inadequate health and safety standards.

Jump forward to June 2020 and a report by Labour Behind the Label, a UK-based non-profit co-operative organisation that works to improve conditions and empower workers in the global garment industry, claimed that staff in Leicester sweatshops reporting symptoms of Covid-19 were being forced to work during the pandemic in unsafe conditions. Depending on the paper you read or political party you follow, you may have heard versions or elements around this story. Was this the latest manifestation of a failing economic system that puts profit before people and sees any sort of regulation as an attack on free market liberty? Or is the machinery of government and the split between local and national decision-makers proving to be a barrier to a rapid effective response?

Some have taken the evidence to show that a negligent city council has turned a politically correct blind eye to this practice, and that this has now led to a spike in Covid-19. Others have argued that successive cuts to the Health and Safety Executive, police and local government – combined with the government decision to reject all of the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) recommendations for improving the fast fashion industry – left the city council relatively powerless and created a situation where unscrupulous employers are able to exploit workers. In a 2019 report, the EAC had recommended that the government should publish a publicly accessible list of retailers required to release a modern slavery statement, supported by an appropriate penalty for those who failed to report and comply with the Modern Slavery Act. In addition, it called for a more proactive approach to enforcement of the National Minimum Wage and a new Extended Producer Responsibility scheme to reduce textile waste.

Labour Behind the Label’s report highlighted the inflated bonuses of directors of boohoo (a fast fashion company); the company’s value dropped by £1.5bn. Meanwhile, some Conservative MPs claimed that there were up to 10,000 modern slaves in Leicester working in garment factories.

Behind this scandal are issues of regulation and enforcement, combined with cuts in funding, and confused and cumbersome decision-making processes between regulatory bodies and local and national government. A steep rise in poverty, restricted access to benefits and the pressure to win global contracts at the lowest price possible, have created a situation where poor people, many of whom are female and migrant, are exploited. When action is taken it often leads to ▶



“There is a strong appetite for change in the fashion industry after the pandemic”

the deportation of the workers rather than sanctions against those in the supply chain who are profiting from, encouraging and supporting this exploitation.

Getting value for money?

Sadly, there does seem to be a small group of people whose motivation is getting rich, staying rich and sharing as little as possible; where talk of purpose, corporate social responsibility and shared vision is anathema. Expecting them to do the right thing, self-regulate and treat their workers fairly is as naïve as expecting a wolf to extol the virtues of veganism.

Linked to this is the fact that many people like a bargain; if they can purchase a pair of jeans for a fiver, they see that as a good thing. The politician who starts telling people, especially those living on low incomes, that they need to pay more for their clothes is one who may well expect to see their popularity fall. In the age of neoliberal globalisation, the consumer is sovereign and it is this ubiquitous belief system that has caused us to collectively turn a blind eye to the real cost of fast fashion.

Despite all the historical coverage of sweatshops in Leicester, the allegations of there being up to 10,000 modern-day slaves working in them, and a rock-solid Labour council and three local Labour MPs, there does not appear to have been widespread sustained morale outrage or a local focused political campaign to end modern slavery. How can such widespread

human rights abuse not have been a sustained, burning issue filling local, if not national, media with story after story while politicians sought to right this wrong?

Would the response be different if this were happening to white men in Guildford? Is this a blatant case of Black lives appearing to matter less than white ones and of women being undervalued and underpaid in the workplace?

Sarah O’Connor, an investigations correspondent at the *Financial Times*, wrote about her experience of uncovering modern slavery in Leicester and alleged: “A local official in Leicester warned me in 2018 that, if I published my story, I would cause mass unemployment for people with no other options. In fact, nothing changed.”

If we stopped to think, we would work out that outfits for a fiver are not made without someone being badly ripped off. Yet we go along with it. Our delusion is helped by convenient myths or racist stereotypes: the people being exploited are not really being exploited, they are working cash in hand; if the UK did not allow this, another nation would, and we would see unemployment rise; if people were being exploited they would not go to work every day; compared with where they come from, this is luxury. And so on.

Cleaning up fashion

One problem is that the people being exploited lack voice and representation. A councillor or MP might

find themselves doing a lot more work to support calls by organised parents for a zebra crossing near a school, than responding to the needs of modern-day slaves, many of whom may struggle with communicating in English, are not unionised, may be wary of officialdom and lack internet access.

Yet, anyone who has worked or lived in the affected areas of Leicester, as I have, will know that they are not populated by victims, but vibrant and creative communities who against all the odds make a success of their lives. Jump forward a few generations and the children of textile workers have degrees, professional jobs and have moved to the city suburbs. In short, these people are a huge resource, bringing much to the city, and, if supported, could contribute even more.

Studies carried out during the pandemic, including a poll commissioned by the RSA in April, show that, as we move on from lockdown, people want a fairer, more just and green society. The huge drop in the value of boohoo shares suggests that investors as well as the public are ready for change. We know that there are many ethical textile factory owners in Leicester, but the gaps in regulation and enforcement and the ‘greed’ within global supply chains makes it very tough for them to operate when sweatshops undercut them. We know the local council has asked for a unified regulatory body and licensing agreements, which would enable them to act swiftly. Surely, then, it is time for local MPs, councillors, police and regulatory bodies to combine with national government to put an end to this practice?

At a time when many are concerned about the future of city centres and the decline of the high street, we could be innovative and connect the skills and expertise of the workers we liberate with the expertise of the many honest textile factory owners in our city to build an industry that pioneers sustainable practice and worker participation. This might require investment from government, which could persuade some of the big fashion labels to invest some of their profits into an ethical textile industry.

An RSA briefing on the sustainable recovery of the fashion industry published in May has shown there is a strong appetite for change in the fashion industry after the pandemic. Fewer than one in five (19%) of people believe the industry should return to business as usual and 50% think the industry should do whatever it takes to become more environmentally sustainable.

Surely, now is the time for a deliberative discussion about the type of economy we want; for leaders to work with people and seek discussion, debate and consensus. Such discussions could be optimistic, bold and prepared to think outside of the neoliberal box we have trapped ourselves in for the past 40 years.

We could become a standard bearer of locally owned business that benefits the community and shows the world what a united Leicester can achieve. The goodwill surrounding such an enterprise and its connections with the Green New Deal ethos of our post-pandemic times could make it a winner. Imagine Leicester City running out onto the pitch in shirts made by a local ethical supplier.

We have just seen SpaceX return safely to earth, living proof of what human creativity and ingenuity, backed by the public and private sector working together towards a shared vision, can achieve. As we talk about #BuildBackBetter and a #GreenNewDeal – as well as Black lives mattering – putting an end to fast fashion, consumerist culture and exploitation is well within our grasp. We can and must make this happen. ■

RSA Fellowship in action

Co-produced curriculum for wellbeing

Dee Gray FRSA was awarded a £2,000 RSA Catalyst Seed Grant to co-produce a ‘best self’ wellbeing curriculum with young carers. Dee co-founded the Young Carers Academy, which aims to recognise and officially reward the work young carers do, earlier this year with Pam Luckock FRSA.

There are an estimated 376,000 young carers in the UK and this population is likely to rise as the population continues to age. Caring is a challenging job at any age, but can put particular pressures on young people, meaning that their opportunities to achieve in education might be curtailed.

The Academy will speak with around 100 young carers over the coming year, to gain their input on what is important to them and the kind of practical help they need. The RSA Seed Grant will mostly be used to give bursaries to these young people in recognition of their time and insight. “We’re hoping that they will feel valued for sharing knowledge with us and will continue to engage with the Academy going forward as co-producers in all we do,” said Dee. “Young carers are incredible people. They want their contribution to society to be recognised, and that’s what the Young Carers Academy will do.”

Young carers develop complex skills in their caring roles – such as identifying problems, managing a team, coordinating different people and budget management – but can often find it hard to translate these into official recognition. Dee’s aim is that the Academy will help to do this: “We’re going to extrapolate all of those experiences and badge them in a way that recognises them as young leaders, and employers will be able to see this as a qualification in future.”

■ To find out more, email youngcarersacademy@gmail.com or graysworks100@gmail.com

BEYOND SOUND AND VISION

Technology has always favoured sight and hearing; might the Covid-19 pandemic encourage innovation related to our other senses?

by Keith Kahn-Harris

🐦 @KeithKahnHarris

In his novel *Seveneves*, Neal Stephenson coined the term “Amistics” to refer to “the choices that different cultures made as to which technologies they would, and would not, make part of their lives”. The term references the Amish, who consciously choose to use certain modern technologies but not others. However, as Stephenson points out, “all cultures did this, frequently without being consciously aware that they had made collective choices”.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed not only the Amistics of the modern world – the collective priorities that have driven technological development – but also the routes not travelled, the developments never made.

Many of us coped with lockdown by turning to the online world. Our phones, tablets and laptops became our lifeline to the world, to our families, friends and workplaces. We have learned to Zoom into book groups and work meetings, have devoured boxsets and collaborated using Teams. That all this has been possible is due to the sustained effort over the past few decades to develop cheap, accessible technologies that enhance our seeing and hearing. These two senses have been privileged to a quite extraordinary degree in technological innovation and, as a result, we are able to connect our eyes and our ears to others remotely when we cannot do so face to face.

A historian could, perhaps, explain why it is that these two senses above all others have been so privileged. It is a mark of the power of the unconscious prioritisation of some sensory technologies over others that we barely question this. Of course, the necessary restrictions on our ability to

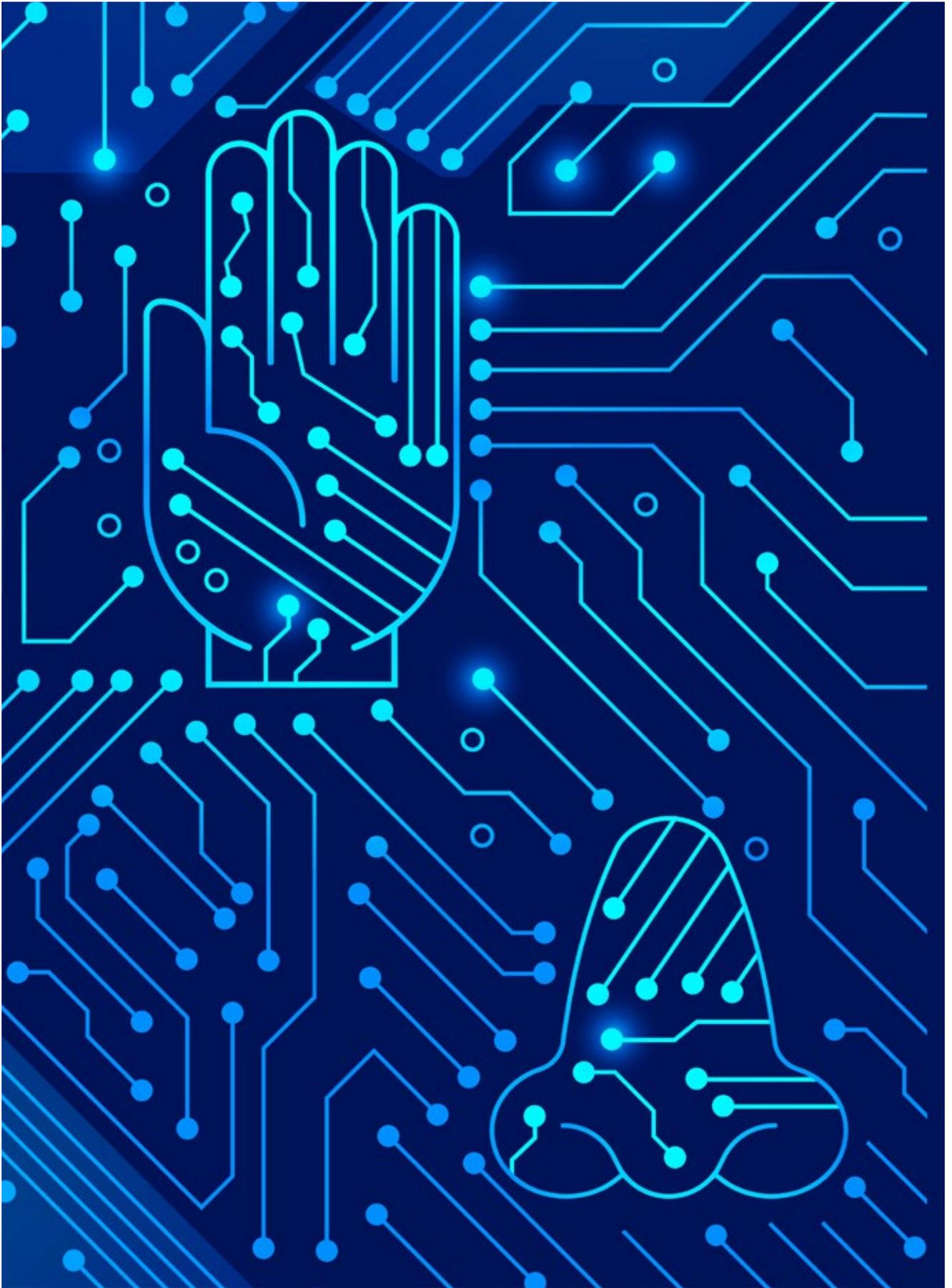
smell, feel and taste with others have been noticed and also mourned. For example, in July *The Guardian* published a moving series of essays called ‘The Power of Touch’ that constituted both an elegy to what we have (temporarily) lost and a call to pay attention to what we must have in future. Yet it is telling that such responses to lockdown have largely seen it as inevitable that physical isolation from each other necessarily means an inability to touch, smell and taste each other. That such limitations may have been the result of our collective and unconscious choices is a possibility rarely considered.

Scent and touch

In fact, technologies for remote sensing beyond sight and sound *do* exist. A few years ago, a device called the oPhone – that contains cartridges that can produce over 300,000 unique aromas – was opened up to crowdfunding. Users could send one another ‘scent messages’. The campaign failed to meet its funding target and, although similar products are occasionally announced, the fact that most of us do not have a system for remote smelling tells its own story.

As far as touch goes, the only area where ‘haptic’ technology – related to touch – has been mainstreamed has been in the buzzing and vibrating on our phones and in computer games. Touch can be difficult to talk about without embarrassment, given its association with sex. Back in the 1990s, I remember seeing breathless articles about bodysuits that would stimulate the erogenous zones, allowing a remote experience of sex, either with a partner at a distance, ▶

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris is a sociologist and writer. His sixth book, *Strange Hate: Antisemitism, Racism, and the Limits of Diversity*, was published by Repeater in 2019



or within an immersive pornographic simulation. Today, while you can buy internet-connected sex toys, the bodysuits remain vapourware and most of us experience sexual pleasure in the offline world, albeit sometimes ‘assisted’ by online stimulation.

It is not clear to me why there has been no Steve Jobs for the online touching, smelling and tasting industries. While the market for such technologies is currently niche, so was the Apple Newton in the 1990s (the John the Baptist to the iPhone messiah). Our Amistic prioritisation of online seeing and hearing technologies over those that would enhance the other senses will only change if there is a determined collective or individual effort to show what we have been missing.

The move online during lockdown was accompanied by a discourse that is simultaneously defiant and mournful. Defiantly, we put our book festivals, religious services, seminars and parties online. Mournfully, we acknowledged that this was a choice imposed on us by the virus and that some things cannot be replaced. The force of the Queen’s consoling promise in April that “we will meet again” lay in its recognition that online togetherness is sensorially limiting and that humans need to engage with the collective bodies of others in richer ways than just seeing and hearing (part of) them.

Sensory innovation

It is possible that, spurred by the prospect of future lockdowns, visionary innovators will develop groundbreaking technologies that will fill this online sensory gap. Perhaps in the next pandemic we will be able to have a fuller online experience of each other. For now though, we do not have to passively await a technological breakthrough. Even amidst the most restrictive phase of the lockdown, we saw the erratic emergence of ad hoc social experiments in finding ways to enhance the sensory experience of online interaction.

Eating together online may well be much more possible and fulfilling than we expect. In April, my extended family joined us for our Passover Seder on Zoom. We saw and heard each other as we went through the liturgy, but for me the most unexpected pleasure was when we all ate our respective meals together. While dining in front of a laptop felt strange at first, the process of using our senses in parallel was unexpectedly rich.

Maybe eating the same food would enhance the experience further. In May, my synagogue organised a blind cheese tasting for the festival of Shavuot (which is traditionally marked by eating dairy products). Cooking and drinking together might also provide its

own delights. In early May, American food writer and chef Samin Nosrat organised a ‘Big Lasagne Party’ where people from around the world joined her in making a comforting recipe together. An online conference organiser I know has started to run a ‘cocktail hour’.

In terms of the sense of touch, it may be that online sex, even if it does not involve the mythical bodysuits, may have more to teach us than we think. While phone sex and pornographic webcamming have a deserved reputation for exploitation, that does not mean that they represent the limits of online sexual imagination. As far back as 1992, when American novelist Nicholson Baker published his bestselling novel *Vox* (which recounts an extended, mutually pleasurable, session of phone sex), we have had glimpses of new possibilities for different kinds of intimacies. Today, I am sure that couples separated by the pandemic may have forged ahead with developing new and creative sexual experiences. What could we learn from these experiments should they be unearthed and collated by some enterprising research?

Smell is the less developed online sense of them all. It may also be the simplest to share. Maybe an online meeting could begin with everyone putting on a pot of coffee? Maybe the organisers of an online conference could distribute the same bunch of flowers to virtual attendees? Smell creates social space. It only takes a bit of preparation to create a collective smellscape for us to inhabit at the same time as we inhabit a Zoom room.

For now, most of these attempts to enrich the online sensorium have occurred without coordination and have not been systematically catalogued. We have barely scratched the surface in finding ways of bringing a broader sensual experience into online interaction. However, as we continue on our slow transition to the world that lies beyond the pandemic (which may include further periods of lockdown), we should at least start to address the Amistic neglect of our senses beyond sight and sound.

The extended transitional period between full lockdown and full opening-up might be the ideal time to experiment, as our online and offline interactions may intersect in interesting ways; for example, in meetings that include both face-to-face and remote participants. If some of us are already remotely touching, smelling and tasting together, what can we do to extend these experiences? ‘Reaching out’ is not just a metaphor: it is an injunction to extend our senses to embrace the other beyond seeing them and hearing them. ■

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A ‘GOOD’ DEATH?

It is time we challenged some of our preconceived notions about death and dying

by Renske Visser

🐦 @Renske_Visser

Death is not usually at the forefront of our minds in ‘normal’ times, but the Covid-19 pandemic has changed this. With many countries announcing their virus death tolls each day, we are constantly reminded of our mortality. While some researchers have suggested that there are universal qualities to what constitutes a ‘good’ death, in reality these ideals are context- and time-specific. Covid-19 has laid bare how many of the assumptions we have about dying well can easily be affected by unprecedented circumstances.

Dying surrounded by loved ones and dying at home are often considered to be good deaths, with dying alone generally receiving bad press. In their article ‘Moral ambiguity in media reports of dying alone’, academics Nicola Turner and Glenys Howarth argue that the media plays an important role in how dying alone is perceived by the general public, and suggest that the media could potentially help to reframe our cultural scripts about death. Many people choose to live alone and can therefore make a choice to die alone as well; this can be a deliberate action that need not be burdened with negative connotations.

Over the past few months, due to the nature of Covid-19, friends and families have not been able to visit their dying loved ones, an experience distressing for all involved. However, even in these hard times, people can still desire to die alone. Lone deaths can be good deaths from the perspective of the dying; it is the societal response afterwards that labels these deaths as ‘bad’. Many see dying in bed, surrounded by loved ones, as the ideal. Social historians suggest that this deathbed scene goes back centuries, and it is therefore not surprising that many fear dying alone. In my research, a 93-year-old woman expressed her

wish to die alone, as she “couldn’t go, knowing she was still loved”. What she wanted was a “room with a quintessential English view”. While this was challenging for her social network, it was what she wanted, and her wishes were respected.

In contrast to dying alone, dying at home is generally seen as desirable. Yet the pandemic has also challenged our understanding of ‘home’; lockdown measures have revealed that being able to leave your house as and when you please is an important part of making it feel homely. People are asked about preferred place of care and death at the end of life. As many choose ‘home’, it is fruitful to unpack what home means to individuals, as this does not necessarily mean their house. When people say ‘I want to die at home’, they might mean ‘I want to die in a familiar or safe environment’, and what they are actually expressing is a desire to have a sense of control. Research has shown that some people prefer to die in hospital, or do not have a preference at all. Home encompasses many entities, from the house to a country. It can refer to people, places and feelings.

Covid-19 has challenged our notions around dying well and dying at home, and is shaking up many things we generally take for granted. There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to death and dying. Notions of good deaths are in flux, shaped by societal changes, including pandemics and conflicts. Hopefully, Covid-19 has enabled us to start having more honest conversations about our end-of-life wishes, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of death and the different ways a ‘good’ death can look. ■



Renske Visser is a medical anthropologist and a research fellow at the University of Surrey

ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS?

China's new National Security Law has created concern worldwide; what next for Hong Kong?

by Rana Mitter

Will historians of the future see the summer of 2020 as a turning point in the history of Hong Kong? Turning points are not always obvious. The handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997 appeared much more momentous at the time than it turned out to be. Although there were significant changes – including the stationing of People's Liberation Army troops in the Central Barracks (previously occupied by the British Royal Navy) and the restriction of a wider electoral franchise (which had been introduced for elections in 1995) – broadly speaking, following the handover, life in Hong Kong carried on as it always had done.

The Joint Declaration signed by China and Britain in 1984, and lodged at the UN, guaranteed that Hong Kong would operate under the mantra “One country, two systems”, with no change to its way of life for 50 years after the handover. The Occupy protests of 2014 seemed to signal a bigger change, but they ended after a couple of months and life seemed to return to normal. Then, in 2019, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, attempted to bring in a bill that could have seen Hong Kong residents extradited to mainland China. Mass protests broke out. At the start of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic curtailed the ability of citizens to gather, as Hong Kong went into lockdown. This forced hiatus allowed China to bring in the most significant piece of legislation in post-1997 Hong Kong's history: the National Security Law (NSL) that was drafted in Beijing and passed in Hong Kong in June 2020.

Law and order

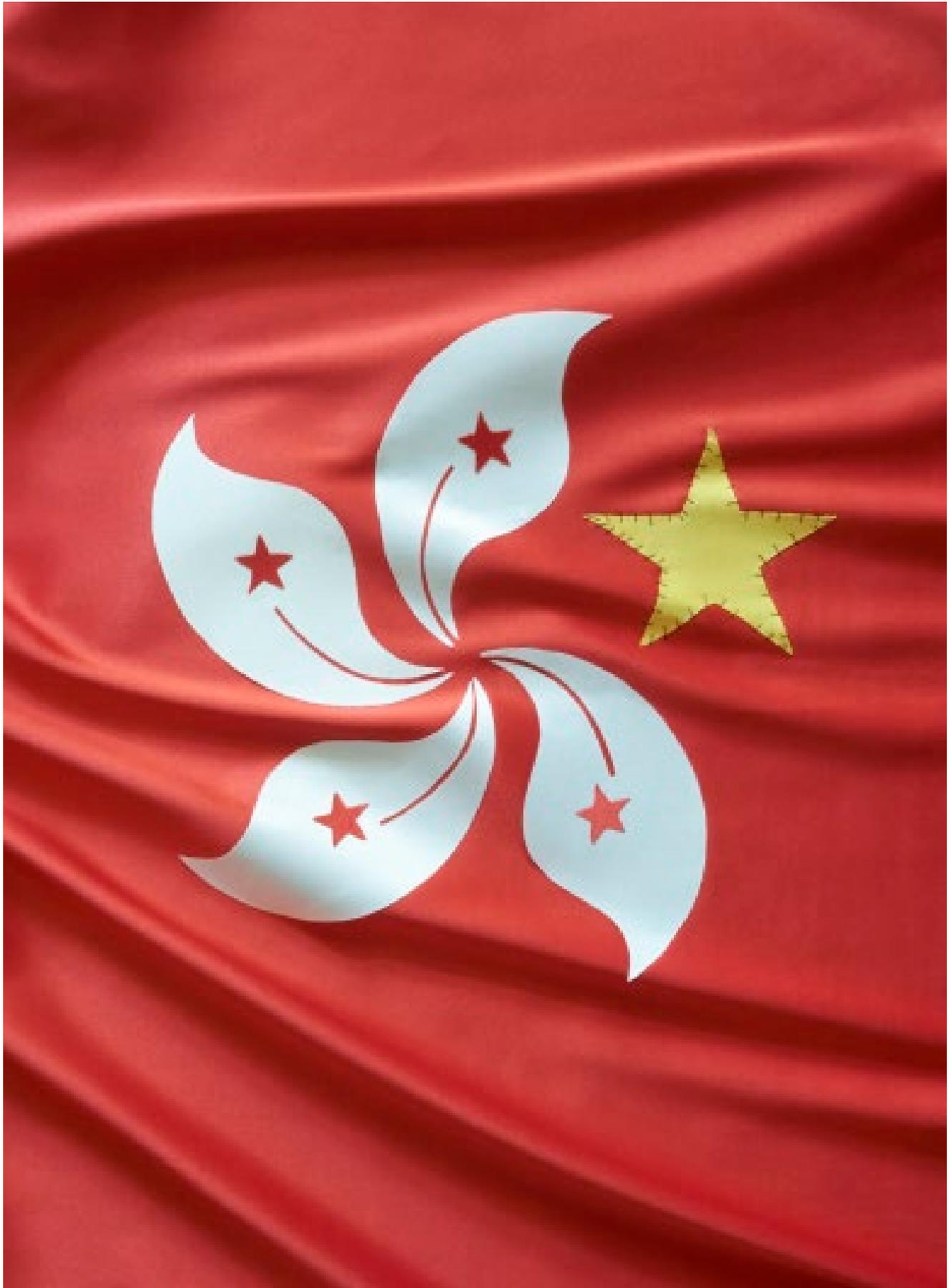
Will the law fundamentally change Hong Kong? It is already clear that in some ways, the answer is

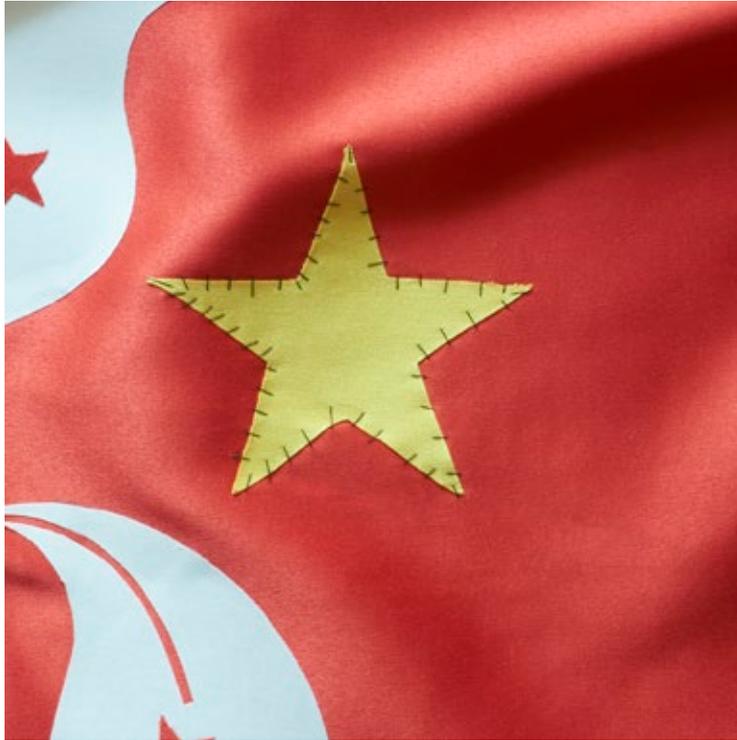
yes. Hong Kong's leaders have given wide-ranging warnings that some peaceful street protests may be banned. The power of much of the law is in its vagueness; for instance, ‘subversion’ has now been criminalised. With nobody certain exactly what behaviour is covered by terms such as this, people have become more cautious, echoing behaviour in mainland China. Political activists are deleting their social media accounts and schools are taking books off the shelves just in case they turn out to be illegal.

The law's defenders argue that it affects only a tiny number of people, such as those demanding independence for Hong Kong (now clearly defined as illegal) and those who have committed violent actions, both of which have been the province of only a small number of protestors. Opponents point out that nonviolent protest and criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, which until now have been freely allowed in Hong Kong, are in danger, as the law does not clearly define what is permitted and what is not.

As a result, all eyes are now turning to Hong Kong's courts. Precedent in how the law is actually applied will be of huge importance. Some national security cases can now be judged in mainland China where there is no guarantee of a jury trial, which is still the norm in Hong Kong. However, the actions of Hong Kong's judges will be at the centre of how the law's effects are assessed by the territory's own population. Observers will want to know whether the NSL will in practice be adjudicated by Hong Kong's judges, who maintain judicial independence in a way not seen in the mainland. Currently, there are foreign (including British) judges serving on Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal. Whether this judicial

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“Hong Kong has sat for decades as an anomaly, a non-democratic but highly liberal entity”

safeguard remains in place is crucial, and whether the court operates independently from the demands of political leaders is even more so.

A fine line to tread

The central issue, though, is whether there is any prospect of Hong Kong’s leaders finding a way to balance their responsibilities between what the Beijing government wants, and what the population of Hong Kong have repeatedly asked for. It has never been practical to have a post-1997 leader in Hong Kong who has no means of communication with Beijing; such a situation would be a recipe for political dysfunction. Hong Kong’s ultimate rulers since 1997 are in Beijing, not London, although that rule is (and remains) defined by the Joint Declaration.

However, good leadership is not just about competence. If so, a decent accountant or indeed civil servant would be sufficient to run Hong Kong. The job demands certain qualities that are hard to find but instantly recognisable when they appear. Charismatic leadership – an ability to empathise with and provide reassurance for the viewpoints of all sections of the population, not just those who explicitly support you – is at the heart of the issue. A leader does not necessarily have to be democratically elected to be accepted by the people, but over the years, business people and bureaucrats have been chosen to run Hong Kong, leading to a perception that economic

success and efficient governance are enough to keep the populace content. This has fed the idea that the unrest in Hong Kong over the past few years is purely a question of money; bring enough of it to the city and the population will be happy again. The city’s authorities seem sometimes to believe a western cliché that Hong Kong is only interested in business, and regards civil rights and free speech as a tedious imposition distracting from what is most important: the economy. They then seem surprised at the (repeated) proof in street protests and elections that Hong Kong’s people are serious about their rights.

Hong Kong has become caught up in a clash of world views. It has sat for decades as an anomaly, a non-democratic but highly liberal entity. In recent years, it has, technically, become more democratic, with the introduction of more elected seats in the Legislative Council and district councils in the decades before and after the handover. For years, it seemed as if the anomaly would be resolved by just letting it run on; after all, Chinese politics is perfectly capable of pragmatism when it wishes to be, claiming that unbridled state capitalism since 1978 is really “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

However, since Xi Jinping’s rise to power in 2012, China has been on a more top-down authoritarian path than it had been under his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. This change in the political weather has interacted with the aftermath of the

2008 global financial crisis, since which Hong Kong's local economy has been in the doldrums. The Chinese government has tried to find ways to reverse the trend, mostly related to further integrating Hong Kong into the economically vibrant South China region, which would also serve the purpose of reducing the differences between the territory and the mainland. As part of the price for that integration, it has undertaken clumsy attempts to create a notion of Hong Kong identity that stresses 'one country' far more than 'two systems'; for instance, trying to impose a school history curriculum that stresses the monolithic and teleological view of modern Chinese history taught in mainland schools, with little of the diversity and debate that marks Hong Kong's understanding of its own quirky and complex past.

Playing to its strengths

Is there a future for Hong Kong? In economic and financial terms, the answer is surely yes. It is no accident that one of the most burgeoning areas in China's huge tech sector is the city of Shenzhen, just across the border. Hong Kong provides a huge pool of capital for that industry, the size of which is matched in few other places in the world, none of which are geographically or politically as well suited to China as is Hong Kong. Engendering fear in Hong Kong's financial sector would not push business to Shanghai, but to London or New York, neither of them locations that Beijing would find more comfortable.

Hong Kong has other strengths that China would do well not to dissipate; its legal system for one. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – which hopes to deliver trillions of dollars in infrastructure financing to Asia, Europe and Africa – is not the top-down, carefully planned system that Beijing sometimes likes to imply, and which alarms some western geostrategists; it is more of a grab-bag of existing schemes, ways to reallocate Chinese foreign direct investment, with an ambitious-sounding framework on top. One area that would genuinely unify and strengthen the BRI is the provision of an internationally recognised system of arbitration for cases it is involved in. Few international partners are keen to operate under Chinese law on a global scale, despite many scholars of the Chinese legal system arguing that the country has improved greatly in recent years in areas such as commercial practice. But in Hong Kong, China has available to it a globally recognised system of common law (essentially British law) which has high levels of credibility and (for now) international presence. This is a valuable resource that would be almost impossible to recreate once destroyed.

Hong Kong's future might not necessarily mean the territory surrendering all autonomy, but it demands leadership and skills that have not yet been evident. The onus is on Hong Kong's political leaders. They have shown convincingly that Beijing's writ ultimately runs through the city; now there will be forensic examination of how far they are willing to celebrate and uphold the "high degree of autonomy" promised under the Basic Law. The most recent developments, in which candidates have been disqualified from standing, and elections have been postponed in consultation with Beijing, are very worrying.

A way forward?

Those who support democracy need to find ways to make their case clearly while working out where they may have to cede ground in order to win the greater prize. A powerful authoritarian government that controls the legislature and has the police on its side is much stronger than the disparate forces backing liberalism. Last year, after the extradition bill was withdrawn, there may have been a brief space for a more productive discussion with a chastened Hong Kong leadership. But part of the problem was that there was no recognised leader of the protest movement, making it harder to find people who could engage in productive dialogue. Hong Kong's limited elected politics are now highly polarised, with pro-Beijing and pro-democrat positions much more starkly opposed than even a few years ago. In the era of the NSL, it will be vital for Hong Kong's democrats to understand what tools they can use productively, including elections and the law. Nonviolence should be an absolute precept. The destruction of property during the demonstrations in 2019 not only provided a gift for Beijing's arguments on cracking down, but also genuinely terrified many ordinary citizens. Yet there is little doubt that the freedom which Hong Kong enjoyed for 23 years has been seriously curtailed. It will take strategy, thought and long-term commitment to preserve what is left.

One danger for Hong Kong is that outwardly it continues to look the same, but suffers a slow erosion of rights and freedoms over the years. The behaviour of its judges, its media (both Chinese and English) and the language of its political leaders will rightly be scrutinised. Hong Kong has overcome its ugly imperial history to become a knowledge economy, based on education, financial services and connection to the world. Such places are hard to build, but easy to destroy. Perhaps the question is not whether 2020 is a turning point for Hong Kong, but how sharp the angle of the turn is, and in which direction it will take this fascinating, unique place. ■

BRINGING CARE HOME

Could Covid-19 kick-start an overhaul of the way we approach support services?

by Ruth Hannan and Hannah Webster

🐦 @HannanRuth @Hannahrose_web

In 2019, Social Care Future, a collective of people with lived experience of the social care system – whether those accessing support themselves or their families – allies and provider organisations came together to present a different future for social care. They decided on a statement that encapsulated their motivation: “We all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us.” This seems straightforward enough, but the current system of social care seems to struggle to accommodate these wishes.

It is not just those that have lived experience of the social care system who want change; a different model of social care would surely benefit the majority of the sector’s workforce as well. According to data from Skills for Care, some 83% of home and residential care staff are women, 17% are from the EU or beyond, 21% are from BAME communities (although this increases in urban areas) and around 30% are employed on zero-hour contracts. The problems for many who work in the social care system are well known: low pay (in 2019, Skills for Care found that many were still earning less than the living wage); the use of zero-hour contracts; and high staff turnover. And this was before the Covid-19 pandemic.

To achieve the desire (and right) to live well in our own homes as well as enabling ‘good work’

for those who most directly support people to live well, significant change must be undertaken. The RSA’s Matthew Taylor has previously set out three conditions needed for change: that there is a pre-existing demand and capacity for change; that there is a crisis that strengthens that demand but also prefigures alternative mindsets and practices; and that there are political alliances, practical policies and innovations ready to be deployed in the period after the crisis. In social care, there is strong evidence that these three components are present. But it is not just about better funding for services, and this is especially true for residential care.

Wellbeing Teams

After hearing all the terrible stories about the harsh working conditions for care workers during lockdown, it has been heartening to gain a different perspective from Wellbeing Teams. This is a home care social enterprise based on the principles of self-organisation (similar to Buurtzorg, a pioneering Dutch healthcare organisation that operates under a nurse-led model of holistic care) and led by Helen Sanderson FRSA.

Wellbeing Teams are built on the principles of self-management, with staff recruited for values as opposed to experience and encouraged to bring their “whole self” to work. Despite the teams’ (acknowledged) fears about working during the pandemic, their

Ruth Hannan is the Transform Programme Manager at the RSA and Hannah Webster is a Senior Researcher in the Public Services and Communities team at the RSA



closeness with one another and with their clients and families has grown. Working together, they have found solutions to problems such as increased isolation by cooperating with other community organisations. For example, a partnership with Community Circles – a charity that brings people together with the support of a trained facilitator – helped them obtain tablets to enable clients to stay in touch with their families. Despite concerns that the team would have to focus more on ‘essential’ care, leaving them less time to work holistically, this has not been the case. For instance, one team member obtained a CD player so a client could listen to her CDs again, and spent time listening to her favourite opera with her.

Due to the structure of the team, they have addressed safety concerns together, ensuring members of staff are able to self-isolate when necessary and that the team are managing their own personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies. As the teams already used cloud-based systems and apps to stay in touch, they have been able to quickly adapt to the tough pandemic situation.

Giving people the support they want

The Wellbeing Teams model offers a potential solution to allowing more people to stay in their own homes and still have a high quality of life; polling data consistently shows that this is what people want.

This desire to stay in our own homes and live well has only been heightened during lockdown. Where care homes used to be seen as a safe option for those unable to meet their own needs without support, they are now regarded with some apprehension. As more data is released on those who have died as a result of Covid-19, it is becoming clearer that care homes were hit hard. The Office for National Statistics reported in July 2020 that it was likely that there were about 30,000 excess care home deaths in England and Wales over the lockdown period compared with the same period in other years. The impact of this high death toll and the knowledge of what the height of the pandemic was like for care home residents can be seen in a recent Opinion poll for the RSA, in which 66% of respondents said that they thought more people should be supported to live at home rather than in residential care. If we want to be supported to live well at home, and those who use social care services want to live in their communities, we need to embrace innovations in the system that can show us the way.

The Wellbeing Teams are certainly demonstrating a potential new way ahead. Their focus on “relationships, compassionate care and keeping decision-making as close to the person as possible” shows a different way for social care; one that has crystallised during the crisis and now needs determination and support in order to see it become the new normal. ■

A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

In light of the Covid-19 crisis, the Fellowship team launched a special round of funding for Fellows' projects responding to the pandemic

by Kimberley Staines

🐦 @kim_outside

I doubt I am alone in finding it nigh on impossible to remember what I ate for lunch today, let alone clearly recalling how the strange weeks of Covid-19-prompted lockdown and the ensuing crisis response have unfolded. In March, as the UK became the latest country to approach lockdown and the devastation that Covid-19 was wreaking became much clearer, the RSA team based in the UK scrambled to assess how we could best support Fellows to, in turn, support their communities in navigating the ongoing uncertainties and attempting to alleviate the damage.

Our response was to launch a fast-tracked Catalyst Award round for Fellows' projects responding to Covid-19 and its effects. Time and time again our entrepreneurial Fellows have proven themselves to be creative thinkers, working with passion and dedication to alleviate social challenges, and the pandemic has only reaffirmed this fact. We received a phenomenal response to the call for projects ahead of the end of April deadline; we prioritised those that would be able to respond to direct need immediately and that demonstrated an ability and a strategy to scale beyond the immediate pandemic crisis. We looked for projects that involved embedded collaborative working and a design-led approach to social change.

We began our process intending to support 10 projects with £2,000 Seed Awards; in response to the significant interest generated, and the clear necessity of the work being carried out, we doubled the fund in order to grant 20 Seed Awards to Fellow-led initiatives. We consider ourselves exceptionally

fortunate to be able to award this funding to Fellows. Setting aside the circumstances in which these awards have been made, we are excited to be enabling these projects, and reassured at the extent of the good work Fellows are doing to support their communities and the wider world as the crisis continues to unfold.

Our intention has been to respond to the pandemic as a truly global community, and our call was open to Fellows around the world. All the projects we granted awards to are doing essential, worthwhile work that deserves recognition. Because we do not have space to list them all here, we have picked two to illustrate just some of the work happening on the ground.

The Moria refugee camp

The Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos faces a desperate situation. Moria holds 22,000 refugees in extremely cramped conditions, the island's hospital is stretched for equipment and the Greek government is unable to provide sufficient personal protection equipment (PPE) for medical staff attending to the camp's healthcare needs. RSA funding is supporting a PPE project led by Helen Zahos FRSA and the Kitrinos Healthcare team, in which refugee volunteers are making masks and gowns using donated sewing machines to protect camp inhabitants and medical staff. This handmade PPE is reusable, provided it can be washed at high temperature. Helen says: "There is something really rewarding about empowering such a vulnerable group of people to be able to actively do something to help themselves during the pandemic."

Kimberley Staines is the Catalyst Fund Programme Manager. She focuses on the Catalyst Award programme and is a core member of the RSA's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Group



United World Schools

United World Schools (UWS) is a charity that provides access to education in remote regions of Cambodia, Myanmar and Nepal, educating over 36,000 children across 218 communities since 2009. RSA funding is supporting an emergency response project in Cambodia, sponsored by Tim Howarth FRSA. “We have been able to rapidly redesign our approach to supporting these communities while maintaining our focus on collaboration and delivering practical solutions,” says Tim. The project aims to reduce the vulnerability of the communities usually supported by UWS, which have been forced to close, by increasing awareness of and access to critical measures required for personal and community safety. This includes facilities for handwashing, knowledge of how to limit the spread of Covid-19 and home-based learning resources to ensure education can continue. The Catalyst Covid-19 Award is covering the training and salaries of teachers in 10 remote Cambodian communities, enabling rapid response initiatives – delivered in the languages of the local community – to support around 7,500 people.

Further steps

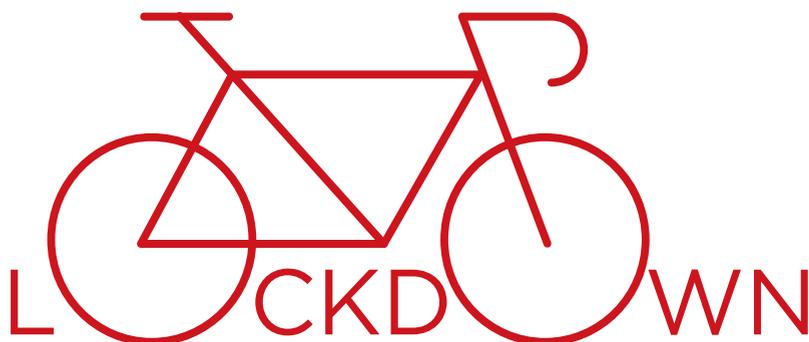
Alongside launching the new Catalyst Award round, the RSA has taken swift steps to support our Fellows’ projects through the crisis. These include establishing a dedicated Wazoku platform for anyone looking for ways to support communities and projects working through the effects of the crisis. We encourage Fellows

to share their initiatives and connect with one another to help develop and support each other’s work.

We have sought to reassure our current Catalyst Award recipients by becoming a signatory to the Covid-19 funders statement online. This has been, on our part, quite a passive act, but it makes clear our commitment to Fellows and signals our understanding that, like the RSA, funded projects are likely to have to adapt their work at this extraordinary time. As funders, the RSA is taking a flexible approach in connection with agreed activities, timelines and reporting.

While it is gratifying to be supporting Fellows’ projects through the Catalyst Covid-19 Award, the nature of the times we are living through is swiftly changing. The world is a different place from the one in which we first announced this grant round. Lockdown restrictions may have significantly eased in the UK, but the risk to life and the social and economic assault of the virus’s impact is no less. Need is continually evolving, as highlighted by the clarion call of the Black Lives Matter movement and the systemic racial inequalities exposed in a leaked Public Health England report into the impact of Covid-19 on BAME life.

Given the events that have unfolded in the short period of time since the grants were offered, we only wish we could support more. For now, we send our heartfelt congratulations to all the exceptional projects supported and express our profound solidarity with all those Fellows and their colleagues working to improve the world around them in these troubled times. ■



Emptier roads have meant more freedom in our new socially distanced lives

by Henning Wehn
 @henningwehn

Friday the 13th. After finishing a show in my tour, *Get on With It!*, at the Assembly Hall in Tunbridge Wells on the evening of that day in March, I thought to myself, “There’s nothing unlucky about this date!”

Well, hindsight’s quite the thing. That day turned out in all likelihood to be my final stage performance of 2020. Shortly afterwards, the government decided to send everyone in the entertainment industry on an enforced sabbatical.

Which means we are all now in charge of our own entertainment.

In my case, this means: cycling, cycling, cycling. With the perfect weather to boot: sun, sun, sun! The sunniest spring since records began.

Living in Hastings, there’s no shortage of great rides along the south coast and the High Weald. What made the first three months of lockdown even more amazing was how diligently most people followed government orders to stay healthy by avoiding fresh air and sitting on their backsides instead.

The roads were absolutely deserted. Going down lanes without seeing a car for hours was what cycling in the 1950s must have been like (minus the chance to break the ride with a stop in a pub for something to eat, with the bonus of supporting a local business in the process). You could even cycle on the A21 without taking your life in your hands. Only a week before, you would not have dreamt of going anywhere near that death trap on a bicycle. But now, the only kinds of cars I encountered were police cars.

Now, here’s a genuine question: did Kent Police and Sussex Police pull out all the stops, repair all their

motors and put every pair of wheels they possess on the road, or are there always that many police cars about and we just do not notice them as they blend in with the usual amount of traffic?

Over time more people have started to realise that leaving the house does not necessarily equate to instant death, and hence traffic has slowly returned; it’s up to about 1990s levels now.

But what has increased massively is the number of people going on leisurely bike rides. Nothing wrong with this, but where were they a few weeks ago? What made anyone stay indoors when they could have just cycled around in the countryside? I am no virologist but I am pretty sure that strengthening your immune system by exercising in fresh air is unlikely to give you Covid.

Now, I do not want to get myself into any trouble here, but do not get me started on the paradox that people were free to – and, seemingly, happy to – queue outside supermarkets to stock up on fizzy pop and processed food, but accepted that they were not allowed to go to the other end of town and sit on the beach.

I get the social distancing lark and, of course, any virus is less likely to spread if people do not mingle, but what is the point of telling people off for not being paranoid? Sit on the beach or, if you think it’s too busy, don’t.

Anyway, there’s a second Friday the 13th this year. In November. By which point I will either have been allowed to go back to work, or will be ready to join next year’s Tour de France (provided it goes ahead, of course). Boris, over to you! ■

Henning Wehn is a German stand-up comedian based in the UK

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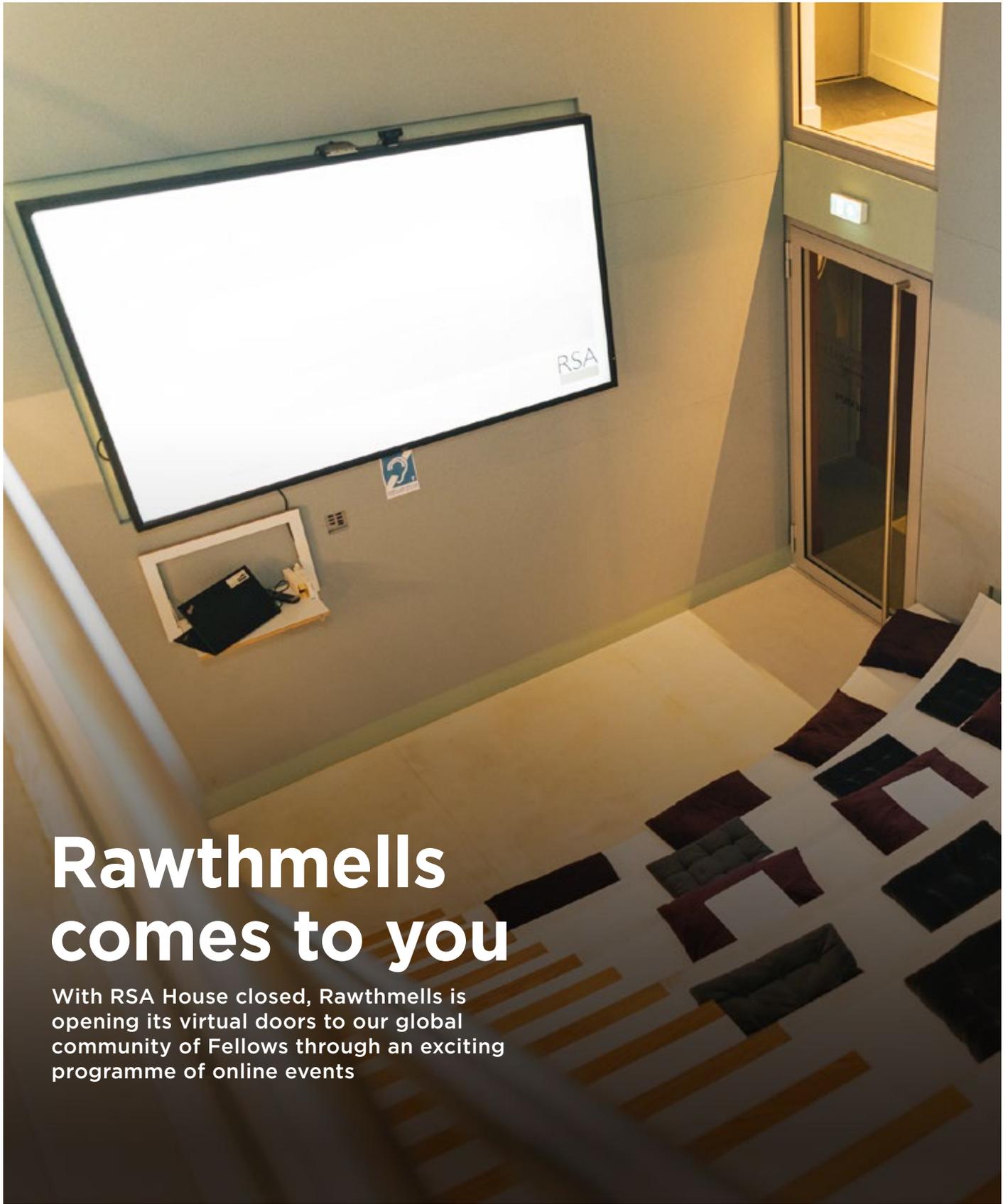


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With RSA House closed, Rawthmells is opening its virtual doors to our global community of Fellows through an exciting programme of online events

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Find out more www.thersa.org/coffeehouse