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EDITORIAL

Covid-19 and the Structural Crisis of Liberal Democracies. Determinants and Consequences of the Governance of Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: The pandemic caused by the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus has revealed impacts well beyond those linked to health. Indeed, it has established itself as what Mauss called a "total social fact", that is, an event that affects every single aspect of society. In this editorial we present some initial reflections on the myriad ways in which the pandemic will affect the State and the relationship between States and citizens as played out in spheres of everyday life. We begin with a brief historical overview of pandemics and the patterns, contradictions and lessons they have left, before looking at the crisis context in which the current pandemic is unfolding. We then take a look at the myriad ways in which the pandemic underlines, emphasises and exacerbates a fundamental rift in the relationship between states and citizens by discussing risk, expertise, communication, de- and re-politicisation and more. We conclude by asking ourselves if - beyond the liberal democracy vs autocracy dichotomy - the Post-Covid scenario may conduce toward a new social contract. Finally, we look to existing sociological work that might provide fruitful in moving forward to address this rift, and provide brief overviews of the contributions in this direction from the authors in this special issue.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19; Democracy; Everyday Life; Expertise; Governance; Mobilisation; Pandemic; Political Communication; State.
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1. Determinants and Consequences of the Governance of Pandemic. An Overview

The pandemic caused by the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus has revealed impacts well beyond those linked to health. Indeed, it has established itself as what Mauss called a "total social fact", that is, an event that affects every single aspect of society. Not only has the epidemic profoundly changed our daily lives and behaviour, but it has, and will continue to have, far-reaching economic and political impacts. A closer look at the social, economic and political consequences of the pandemic suggests they are not directly attributable to its epidemiological features alone. Instead, they are shaped by the ways in which national and local societies reacted, and the dynamics thus generated hold the key to understanding the vulnerability and non-sustainability of the current social and economic model, and the fragility of the political and economic institutions that represent it. A study conducted by ESPON, which analysed the spread of the virus across 35 cities in the first phase (March – July 2020) by mapping death rates and charting the causal factors gave prominence to a certain feeling of state overconfidence in their health care system, and in their system of governance (Bourdin and Rossignol 2020). The hindsight of a typical sequence analysis, where we can distinguish between a time before, during, and after an event is not yet here. The timeframe for living with the pandemic seems to be getting longer as uncertainties related to variants, delayed circulation in different countries, and the length of vaccine rollouts expand.

Covid-19 continues to trigger a range of political consequences. Few among the current crop of Western politicians have ever faced anything like a pandemic and its economic fallout. From a power point of view, States' priorities have been to contain the disease and mitigate its effects by getting manpower and money to hospitals in the most affected areas, and negotiating the cost and quantity of vaccines with pharmaceutical corporations. The European Union suspended the stability pact: a major shift in its political economy approach, and despite contention and rivalry among member states, was able to forge agreement on the Next Generation recovery fund. Debates on the necessity of public investment are back on the agenda in every country and international organisation, and the austerity measures of the last decade have been openly criticised. In addition to "cash injections" and economic policy innovations, a debate on how governments should manage welfare and health systems has also opened up. The need to improve tax collection and tackle avoidance, and to build solidarity and redistribution mechanisms has perhaps never been so apparent as in the wake of the health and economic crisis, which has increased budget deficits.

In April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) even suggested the creation of a one-off wealth or corporate tax to offset the costs of Covid-19, while supporting "international tax reform for greater equity". On 5 June 2021, at the end of a forty-eight hour negotiation session, the finance ministers of seven of the world's largest economic powers - the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, Italy and Japan - expressed their "strong support" for a "global minimum tax" and for a "fair" allocation between the countries of the North and the South, and for the "right to tax" the profits of very large companies, with a global minimum tax of at least 15% on a country by country basis as proposed by the OECD (2021). They also agreed to reach an agreement at the July meeting of G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors.

In the same timeframe, the Chinese Communist Party hosted a meeting of communist parties, with a total of 48 countries represented. There, Xi Jinping called for closer cooperation and strengthened dialogue and exchanges according to the principles of "independence, equality, mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of others". Those present were invited to "unite and oppose the new cold war together: the world wants justice, not hegemony".

Underlying this trend towards debating and rethinking political and economic assets is a questioning of the entire relationship between citizens and governments. Nothing feeds the rumour mill more than the suspicion that politicians are hiding the truth. China, the first country to tackle the outbreak, taught the world a big lesson about Covid-19: "It can be contained". South Korea impressed compared to European and American countries. The World Health Organization report published on February 28 2021 attributed these results to the way it had ploughed manpower and technology into the meticulous enforcement of quarantine. Yet nothing was said of the unintelligible mechanisms of State infrastructural power employed to that end. SARS has seen Asian Countries learn how to manage epidemics in the past few years: South Korea, as well as Taiwan and Thailand, have developed tracing mechanisms and crisis protocols identified as models for best practices by epidemiologists and virologists). No such protocols or pools of expertise existed for the leaders of Western democracies, where respiratory viruses were considered as diseases of the past compared to "contemporary" health threats. Policy makers struggled to understand whether citizens would tolerate harsh surveillance regimes like China's, or massive tracking systems like South Korea's. Italy's lockdown was initially self-policed and started as a bottom-up campaign with high levels of support from both the educated upper middle classes and trade unions. But it proved less effective than China's, and State enforcement mechanisms were soon added. Bitter stand-offs unfolded: over halts to manufacturing, and how to define essential goods and maintenance chains. The pandemic has in that sense mobilised the centralised role of national governments, sometimes in collaboration with and sometimes in contrast with subnational authorities. Liberal countries, the UK especially, have been reluctant to lockdown their populations, close social spaces, and stop production. They underlined the primacy of civil and market rights, and individual responsibility to self-isolate and prevent an economic crash. They described extensive tracking measures as violations of individual privacy, yet used the health emergency to take illiberal steps. The Hungarian case is a prominent example where the pandemic was instrumentalised by President Orbán to subvert the basic rules of representative democracy by declaring an indefinite state of emergency (as he had already done with immigration). After analysing over 13,000 Covid-19 policies worldwide, robust results in comparative policy analysis show that early Covid-19 policy responses across countries have been based on different kinds of policy mix dominated by authoritative policy tools – such as curfews and lockdowns, border restrictions, quarantine and tracing, and regulation of businesses – expanding towards other policy instruments in terms of "nodality, treasury, and organization, such as measures for information management, advisories and warnings, administration of government services, and provision of testing and treatment", with an increase in the number and variety of instruments implemented, and a certain "shift in policy strategies towards more authoritative tools" (Goyal and Howlett 2021: 259).

Historically, epidemics have also played a prominent role in driving major social surveys and public statistics. Cholera outbreaks led to public interventions in the areas of health, hygiene, and urban planning. In many respects, the development of the State and social insurance during the 19th century was structured by responses to health crises. It is plausible to imagine that the Covid-19 epidemic might have similarly profound long-term effects on the role and power of the State, as well as on citizens' demands and claims. There is thus no doubt that political science and political sociology have a major role to play in understanding and interpreting the eminently political nature of pandemic management, and in comparing country cases. Two

distinct modes, sometimes distinct and sometimes followed in tandem, have emerged thus far. The first is the basic fight against contagion, where broad-ranging public efforts focused on preparing to care for and treat the sick. The second is to prevent contagion as far as possible through emergency measures to isolate the population. Countries differ in their cost-benefit analyses, weighing the sacrifice of parts of their populations against saving their manufacturing sectors from collapse. The virtues of post-pandemic economic expansion are discussed in some economic circles, along with the comparative advantages of maintaining an active manufacturing sector at a time when competitors will fail and reduce their activity. The future of State intervention is back on the political agenda, with demands for larger State investments, and even for a new internationalism with global 'helicopter money' managed by the IMF, or at least for a European version driven by the Union's central Bank.

In this editorial we present some initial reflections on the myriad ways in which the pandemic will affect the State and the relationship between States and citizens as played out in spheres of everyday life. We begin with a brief historical overview of pandemics and the patterns, contradictions and lessons they have left, before looking at the crisis context in which the current pandemic is unfolding. We then take a look at the myriad ways in which the pandemic underlines, emphasises and exacerbates a fundamental rift in the relationship between states and citizens by discussing risk, expertise, communication, de- and re-politicisation and more. Finally, we look to existing sociological work that might provide fruitful in moving forward to address this rift, and provide brief overviews of the contributions in this direction from the authors in this special issue.

2. A recent history of the pandemic

Perhaps Camus was being ironic as well as cynical in saying "But what does it mean, the plague? It's life, that's all". Indeed, pandemics are far from a new experience.

Forty years ago, a new "pandemic" spread among humans AIDS (Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome), a disease caused by the HIV virus. Subsequently, at least five other large-scale alarms were launched, all of which had some points in common (Duclos 2009).

- They derive from previously unknown vectors, such as the HIV virus for AIDS, and the prion protein for "Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy" (BSE, more popularly known as "Mad Cow Disease"), or from unexpected mutations of already known viruses.
- They all come from "epizootics", that is, from animal diseases that have crossed the immune barrier and become contagious to humans.

There are also relevant differences: AIDS has killed 32.7 million people since 1983, according to UNAIDS official data, while BSE has claimed far fewer lives, 214 in 1996, of which sixty-eight in the UK alone. Jumping to humans in 1997, avian influenza (standardized as H5n1) counted 248 fatalities up to 2008, of which eighty percent were in Southeast Asia. Between 2002 and 2009, SARS claimed 916 victims, almost all, once again, in Southeast Asia. Both avian influenza and SARS initially appeared in Guangdong, the global manufacturing hub. Swine 'flu, standardized as H1n1, then spread in 2009 and was classified as a "pandemic" the following year. By comparison, it is estimated that seasonal influenza causes 300,000 deaths a year worldwide. In 2014 the Ebola pandemic erupted, causing more than 10,000 deaths, especially in the Western

part of Sub-Saharan Africa (Birch 2021). It was not until 2016 that the World Health Organization declared the last outbreak 'inactive', warning that more infections could occur in the future.

Only six years after the last pandemic, Covid-19 arrived, along with the uproar we are all familiar with. It has been called "a monster" but, if we think of the long series of pandemics that preceded it, is a "familiar monster" (Davis 2020). The current pandemic presents both new aspects and confirms trends from the past. As a "total social fact" which affects every single aspect of global society, it is the first pandemic since AIDS that fully involves the wealthy Western part of the world. BSE was essentially a British event, rather than a global one, and SARS, and the Avian and Swine influenza pandemics, were perceived as Afro-Asian viruses confined to poorer areas of the world and not lethal for developed capitalist countries. On closer inspection, sadly, AIDS has counted two thirds of its victims in sub-Saharan Africa.

On the other hand, trends in citizens' perceptions of the management of pandemics by politicians appear to find some confirmation. In the cases of AIDS and BSE, public opinion was concerned about how authorities had underestimated the danger and postponed policy decisions. From SARS on, on the contrary, institutions were criticised for their alarmism and "using" pandemics to hide "the real problems". Controversies over restrictions to mobility and even on the expediency of wearing masks are symptomatic of an attitude that would have been considered incredible until just a few years ago given the seriousness of the health situation. Now, instead, anti-mask movements and protests against compulsory vaccines have spread to all Western countries. Elites have been accused of taking advantage of pandemics to test a form of "world management" under the flag of authoritarianism in politics and "hygienism" in health.

According to the World Health Organization, forty pathogens have been discovered since 1967. In the meantime, the world's population has grown rapidly and urban concentration has reached unprecedented levels: today more than half of the global population lives in cities where many have an income below the poverty level, live in informal or makeshift housing and suffer from degrading hygienic conditions. Means of transport and distribution have developed, causing both a greater spread of disease vectors (mosquitoes are excellent airline customers!), and greater response efficiency. The 1918 "Spanish" influenza pandemic reflected these patterns. The disease was imported into the United States from China through a battalion of American soldiers, and took only fifteen days to spread throughout the country. In two months it had reached Europe and found a favourable niche in army camps and battlefield trenches where it killed young soldiers in their tens of thousands, becoming a major factor in the "Battle of empires". The collapse of the huge German spring offensive of 1918, and thus the outcome of the War, has been attributed to the fact that the Allies, unlike their enemy, were able to replenish their sick armies with newly arrived American troops. Eventually, the pandemic killed at least thirty million people, half of them in the Punjab, Mumbai and other parts of western India, where grain exports to Britain and brutal requisitioning practices coincided with a fatal drought. In another example, the microbe that causes cholera was introduced into human populations during the era of the British colonization of the South Asia hinterlands, but it was the rapid changes of the Industrial Revolution that provided the opportunities for Vibrio cholera to transform into a pandemic-causing pathogen. New modes of travel (steamships, canals and railways) ferried the microbe deep into Europe and North America, allowing it to strike the most modern and prosperous cities of the nineteenth century, killing rich and poor alike, from Paris and London to New York City and New Orleans. In 1836, it felled King Charles X in Italy; in 1849, President James Polk in New Orleans; in 1893, the composer Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in St. Petersburg (Shah 2016: 6). Although it seems like a souvenir of the past, cholera struck Naples and Southern Italy in 1973 and, more recently, Haiti in 2010.

What is different compared to these earlier examples is that today we no longer suffer from large-scale famines or continent-wide wars, despite structural economic crises. Furthermore, the majority of the inhabitants of the planet have access to running water – albeit with serious inequalities – and personal hygiene is more widespread. How, then, was a pandemic possible in the middle of the Third Millennium?

It seems that viruses adapted to the "technological era". Nowadays the effectiveness of selection mechanisms works to the disadvantage of humans, allowing viruses to bypass antibiotics: in the United States, one in two "golden staphylococcus" is no longer sensitive to erythromycin, methicillin or tetracycline; in France half of pneumococci are resistant to penicillin and even a recent medicine like Tamiflu is less effective today. This situation makes the treatment of post-flu diseases more uncertain and explains the considerable differences between countries in terms of the lethality of a virus and, perhaps, the number of its variants. Only recently have doctors reigned in their massive use of antibiotics. Yet even today governments are more in favor of intervening after the spread of a new virus than they are of preventing the problem. This is nothing new: in the past, the European and American authorities were unable to control the preparation techniques for blood transfusions which then contributed to the AIDS emergency. Nor did they make the production of animal meal, which infected cattle with BSE, safer. At least three major alarms, the most recent of which concerned the industrial breeding of poultry and pigs, have led to similar policy failures in both developed and developing countries.

On the other hand, these past experiences only considered those areas where a large rural population lived in close quarters with pig and avian farms to be at risk. In evaluations of fear not all diseases are the same. The populations suffering from them are not the same. Gastroenteritis (bacterial or viral) kills almost a million children in poor countries every year but has never caused great unrest in the West. In the West, the fear of compulsory vaccination has fostered a milieu of generalized distrust and created obstacles to open information on epidemiological facts and therapeutic solutions: although vaccines have unquestionably saved millions of lives and side effects have been statistically limited, large swathes of Western populations fear some universal bio-power whose goal is to intervene in the "collective human body".

This is not a question of ignorance, many of those concerned about vaccinations are well informed and well educated: rather, the delicate balance between the individual and the community (that is, between our private subjectivity and bio-social rights) is at stake. As individuals, we may decide to refuse a vaccine and remove a mask just as we may collectively choose to tolerate a certain number of road deaths rather than speed reduction mechanisms in our vehicles. This is not very different from situations elsewhere, for example, in Nigeria, where polio has reappeared due to local fears about vaccinators poisoning recipients. In rich and poor countries alike such fears have been explained by Claude Lèvi-Strauss, who argued that we are "a humanity saturated by its own number and the ever-increasing complexity of problems, as if its skin had been irritated by rubbing due to material and intellectual exchanges increased by the intensity of communications".

Humans also suffer from a serious cultural blindness. This blindness refers to an anthropo-absolutist self-perception, one that has remained relatively unquestioned until recently, when globalization has reduced the spaces of separation. Humanity has tended to distinguish itself from the concept of 'animal', attributing a regressive quality to the latter. Even human dignity is seen to spring from our uniqueness and remoteness from the animal species. Similarly, humans have tended to separate themselves from the 'natural world', defining this as first and foremost as a set of resources to fuel human progress. The expressions 'to become like an animal' or 'transform into an animal' indicate how other species, despite their diversity, are included in a single category considered in opposition to the human one: to become more like one of them is not taken to suggest an enlargement of the human perspective, but rather a fall into a state of "bestiality". The human being is

considered as belonging to another dimension, and anthropogenesis a "qualitative leap" that erodes the biological substrata shared with other animal species. A chimpanzee and a fly have more in common, according to this logic, than a human being and other anthropomorphic species (Corbey 2008). By denying not only cooperation with the animal category, but also any human responsibility towards it, we stress both a "natural order" that regulates coexistence on the planet, and build an insurmountable border between savagery and humanity. But this contamination, denied by postmodern society, is resurrected by pathogens.

If the Covid-19 virus's animal origin is a critical mystery to solve (did it originate from a bat, a snake, a pangolin, from a Chinese laboratory?!), speculation about which wild creature originally harbored the virus risks obscuring a more fundamental truth: today humankind is paradoxically more vulnerable to pandemics than in the past, and this is due to the accelerating pace of biodiversity loss in the sixth mass extinction. Despite placing "nature" outside of and separate from culture, economics, and daily life, our societies modify the environmental conditions of their own reproduction, and do so in a capitalist context that ignores our interdependence with ecosystems in a state of perpetual evolution. There is no such thing as "a natural disaster": there are viruses that constantly mutate in order to survive. But the circumstances in which a mutation becomes life-threatening depend on human actions.

Many of the hundreds of microbial pathogens that have emerged since 1940, either for the first time or in territories where they had never been detected before, originated in the bodies of animals. Some came from pets and livestock, more than two-thirds from wildlife. As argued by Sonia Shah (2020: 6), "that's not the fault of wild animals. Although the rhetoric might suggest otherwise, wild animals are not especially infested with deadly pathogens, poised to infect us. In fact, most of these microbes live harmless in these animals' bodies. The problem is the way that cutting down forests and expanding towns, cities, and industrial activities create opportunities for animal microbes to adapt to human bodies". Habitat destruction forces wild species into ever smaller spaces, increasing their likelihood of coming into repeated, intimate contact with the humans spreading into their territories. It is this kind of contact that allows the microbes that live in their bodies to cross over into ours, transforming benign animal microbes into deadly human pathogens. Ebola is one such case: according to a 2017 study, outbreaks of this disease, which have been linked to several species of bats, are more likely to occur in places in Central and West Africa that have experienced recent episodes of deforestation. The destruction of the bats' habitats forces them to roost in trees in backyards and farms, and microbes are easy to pass on when people take a bite of fruit covered in bat saliva. Such "encounters" – defined as "spillover" – allow a host of viruses carried harmlessly by wild and farm animals to slip into human populations where they transform into human pathogens. Similarly, mosquito-borne disease outbreaks have been linked to the felling of forests and the subsequent transformation of land: fewer trees means fewer leaves and roots on the ground, and more sunlit puddles where malaria-carrying mosquitoes thrive. The decline of both "specialist bird species" (especially woodpeckers and rails) and native opossums in America has favoured the spread of tick-borne diseases, and Afro-Asian "wet markets" feature wildlife animals caged in close proximity, allowing microbes to jump from one species to the next. "[M]any more species are raised in factory farms, where hundreds of thousands of individuals are packed together, providing microbes lush opportunities to turn into deadly pathogens" (Shah 2020: 6).

Nowadays we live in a highly connected world, where almost everyone travels and human networks of potential diffusion are vast and open: "epidemics are the dark side of modernization, medical and political progress; they represent the impossibility of securing the body politic in an ever-more interconnected, technologically advanced and globalized world" (Keck et al. 2019:1). Responding to, and preparing for, the inevitable yet unpredictable emergence of new epidemics and pandemics has become fertile terrain for

imagining the future of humanity. A mixture of scientific curiosity and medieval fears prompts the question: how and through what mechanisms can we continue to live together? At the same time, the term epidemic is rhetorically attractive, often used for non-infectious diseases and non-pathological conditions such as obesity, diabetes, even a fashion or interest in a new rock song. Memes, tweets and more "go viral". Sociologists, on the other hand, continue to have a complicated relationship with the study of epidemics and their control: outbreaks are used to justify policies of segregation, quarantine and population surveillance; but they are also engines of scientific discovery and innovation, developing bacteriology, parasitology and other medical sciences. The current pandemic, in particular, poses sociological questions about a number of relevant issues:

- the legacy of colonialism in the (geographical, and above all cultural) spread of the virus;
- the role played by the European Union in its attempt to gain popular legitimacy by governing epidemics;
- the contradictions of a market economy based on global-scale concentration and the need for social distancing;
- the changes to patterns, forms and claims in participation and conflict in an ongoing critical event or juncture;
- the ultimate irony of Biden's policies appearing more socialist than anything that Bernie Sanders proposed!

The latter - only half in jest - is just one of the numerous paradoxes produced by the "Capitalism virus" and the myriad tensions between human rights to health, wealth, and more underlined in the pandemic. With this brief exploration of the recent history of pandemics and the questions, contradictions and patterns they reveal, we turn next to discuss the crisis context in which the current pandemic is constantly unfolding and point to the complex interlinkages at work. The discussion then turns to questions of politicization.

3. The crises before the crisis

Just a few weeks into the global spread of the COVID- 19 virus it became clear that this crisis would be not only about health, but about the economy, politics and society. Or, better, it became clear that this pandemic would add to and exacerbate the dynamics of existing crises. Crises would overlap and converge into a paradigmatic rift which, we suggest, can be traced to the crisis of welfare capitalism and liberal democracy. This crisis is not just a political one, rooted in decreasing electoral participation and states' inability to mobilize citizens and capital to provide collective goods. Instead, massive increases in inequalities (Piketty 2013), reinforced by "state selective activism" (King and Le Galès 2017a) and the crisis of the fiscal state (Streeck and Mertens 2015), has reduced its 'unifying energy' (Poggi 2001). Desmond King and Patrick Le Galès (2017b: S13) demonstrate how a set of contradictions is leading to structural changes in states: the "reconfigured state fails to protect some social groups from economic and social changes. Moreover, the internal changes to the state's organization and engagement with societies through displaced and reduced public services induces a sense of abandonment by the state amongst citizens." Be that as it may, another important dimension of the crisis regards political communication. In the context of the pandemic, communication issues emerge that point to a broader crisis in the relations between science, politics and everyday life, expressed in the public sphere. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, we have to ask ourselves whether we are also living through an epistemological crisis, a questioning of the certainties of modernity that underpin the kind of control over environment and society discussed in the previous section: "we experience an epistemological

crisis when the schemata and paradigms, the criteria of truth, intelligibility and rationality" that we use to understand a crisis, "may themselves, in turn, come to be put in question at any time" (MacIntyre 1977: 244).

Those who produce science are well aware of its relative, provisional and imperfect nature. Kuhn (1970) sums this up in The Structure of Scientific Revolution. Today, however, this awareness is spilling out from the scientific community and permeating society, removing the veil of certitude and objectivity under which politics has long interfaced with science. There is no crisis of science underway, then, but there is a crisis in the relationship between science, politics and society.

This has been especially clear in the Covid-19 pandemic, which has forced individuals to deal with science in their everyday lives more than ever before (Saracino and Pellegrini 2021). In Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, the public has gone behind the curtain – and scientists suddenly find themselves centre stage. Citizens find themselves direct participants in the tortuous, provisional, uncertain and fallible world of the scientific process, while scientists are cast in a public role, communicating their ideas to a wide audience and showcasing their disagreements and conflicts, removing the veil of objectivity and infallibility.

The conflicts that arise around themes including health, risk management, freedom of choice, and the relationship between what is artificial and what is natural that have become so public in recent times reveal the subpolitical character of scientific and technological decisions, actions and practices. The concept of the subpolitical was introduced by Beck in 1986 (Beck 1992) in the immediate aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster (though he had already written 'the risk society'), and fed the debate about the relationship between politics, science, technology and the management of risk created by human intervention in nature. Beck's reflections are more valid than ever in the pandemic as a total social fact with profound effects in every sphere of social life. If we add to this the way the pandemic challenges the epistemological and ontological roots of modernity, it is clear that this crisis touches on the relationship between individuals and the collective sphere just as much as that between humans, other species, and the environment. We can affirm that the pandemic represents a global and universal risk, in the sense that it affects everybody. This is not to claim that all people are exposed to risk in the same ways, either between or within states (the situation in India alone, dramatic at the time we are writing this piece, belies that). The pandemic crisis is an extraordinary multiplier of inequalities in the distribution of resources and risks.

There are clear gaps in levels of resilience between those who have managed to reconcile economic security and health protection and those who have lost their jobs or businesses, who suddenly find themselves in poverty. Between those who were obliged to continue working in occupations deemed essential services, in contact with others and obliged to commute, and those who were able to work from home (Hong et al. 2021). Between families who lived through lockdowns in large and comfortable spaces with access to the technologies they needed to stay in touch, and those who were confined to smaller spaces, without the economic, social, cultural, or technological resources to allow their children to follow distance learning properly, not to mention those living in shantytowns, camps, tents, barracks and advanced forms of housing deprivation. As Stasolla and Vitale (2020) state, when the slogan "I stay home," spread, repeated by politicians, actors and sports figures in order to encourage the public to abide by the lockdown and prevent the spread of COVID-19, a person living in a shantytown in Rome told them: "I stay at home? No. You stay at home. I'm staying in the camp. All the difference is there!" The pandemic also increased risks linked to domestic and psychological abuse. All together, these risk factors are interdependent, in a "complex interpenetration of medical, economic, political, and epistemic crises" (Brubaker 2020: 11). In this sense, the various dimensions of the crisis appear as closely interlinked, showing the relevance of an encompassing, comprehensive sociological approach to the ongoing pandemic crisis.

In this unique scenario, where half the world's population is living in lockdown, it is crucial to understand how people frame, discuss, and react to these political economic choices. It is also crucial to analyse changes in subjectivation, collective representations, everyday practices and relations with others. Nationalism seems to be on the rise (again) in many countries, with support for radical right-wing parties growing according to opinion polls in many European Countries. Police and health workers are supported, in part by virtue of their technical skills, but also because the rigid hierarchical structures that characterise them lie in contrast to the network model, seen as less efficient and, perhaps, too similar to the virus. Political contention over the meaning and policies of the state, its public nature and the relationship between protection and freedom is rife. Forms of participation, campaigning, mutual aid, and direct solidarity have also changed with forced social distancing. In many western societies, youth participation increased during the pandemics, both through NGOs and in the form of personal volunteering to help vulnerable neighbours (Vitale and Recchi 2020). Many public and private organisations formerly involved in selective solidarity based on means testing and other methods for selecting 'deserving' recipients have begun to give unconditional support instead. Many authorities have moved past previous ideological policies on homelessness, drug addiction and more, with the pandemic crisis acting as a catalyst for change. In the emergency, everyone could ask for food aid and health support. Support, care, reciprocity have returned to the large vocabulary of motives, especially in the earliest stage of the pandemic and its almost Durkheimian collective effervescence, complete with diffuse feelings of solidarity and belonging (Recchi et al. 2020) and the recognition of the interdependence of heterogeneous individual interests (Bianchi 2020).

In mid-May 2021, Covid-19 had claimed the lives of a reported three million people around the world; the true figure is probably far higher. The end of the pandemic is not yet close and signs are contradictory. On one hand, by mid-April, the world had manufactured the billionth dose of Covid-19 vaccine, and those few countries that have already managed to vaccinate a large proportion of their population are seeing the benefits. On the other hand, new global weekly case numbers have nearly doubled over the past three months as new variants spread. Worldwide, the number of reported new daily infections hovers around 900,000, although this is a huge underestimate. More than a third of them are in India, where infections are still rising: there, the second wave looks set to get a lot worse before it gets better. The US still holds the record for the highest reported daily Covid-19 deaths (4,500 on January 12th, 2021), and the most reported deaths overall, nearly 600,000. Brazil is second, with 4,249 deaths on April 8th and around 400,000 in total, but on May 3rd India reported 3,449 new deaths and, so far, it has calculated just over 200,000 deaths since the pandemic began. Official figures are thought to greatly underestimate the true number of cases and deaths, as the actual number of daily infections in India could be more than 14 million and some models have predicted the daily cases could pass half a million in May. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), based in Seattle, suggests that India will see increases in cases until the middle of May: with hospitals already overwhelmed, this would have further devastating consequences (Le Page and Wilson 2021).

Why is India experiencing such devastating case numbers? Although new variants are referred to as an excuse for the failure to control the virus, what is happening in India also depends largely on what actions are taken in the quasi-continental country. In response to its first wave, India imposed a strict country-wide lockdown on March 24th, 2020: the pandemic peaked in September and gradually declined up to February 2021. At its height, India was reporting just under 100,000 new cases and around 1,200 deaths per day. But the second wave has been allowed to spread through the population in a much less controlled way, since the government has been reluctant to impose another lockdown. Politicians, including the prime minister Narendra Modi, said earlier this year that the virus had been defeated, and encouraged mass gatherings, giving people

the perception the pandemic was over. As Jules Naudet (2021) noted, "The anti-science ideology of radical Hinduism that guides Mr. Modi has unsurprisingly led him to ignore the warnings of scientists". Even when cases started rising in February 2021, Modi avoided preventing political rallies and religious festivals, and relaxed social distancing. Narendra Modi has been triumphalist at the United Nations and the Davos Forum, promising vaccines to all poor countries and building himself as the figurehead of the developing world. Naudet's (2021) robust analysis clearly shows that "India is the world's largest producer of vaccines, but has chosen to export them rather than immunise its own population. The immunisation campaign was essentially regulated by market logic, with the government considering vaccines as a private good and not a public good, and thus leaving them to be paid for by Indian citizens (at a price out of reach for the majority of the country's huge population)."

Lax measures, a lack of surveillance over social distancing precautions and a very slow rate of intervention provoked a perfect storm, so much so that the weekly news magazine India Today chose the title "The failed State" for its May 17th issue: a common belief addressed to all those governments unable to control the virus. Other countries could now see cases soar in a way similar to India, especially where social distancing restrictions are eased and vaccination levels are low. Cases of the delta variant are rising in the UK, where restrictions have again been eased at speed, at the time of writing. India is also amongst the top 15 nations with highest out-of-pocket expenditure on health, "simply because there is no social security system worth that name" (Jaffrelot and Jumle 2020). In addition to the economic crisis that will expand the chasm between the rich and the poor, whose numbers are increasing very quickly this year (Jaffrelot and Thakker 2020), "while the former have access to private hospitals, the latter will not be able to spend enough money for their health" (Jaffrelot and Jummle 2020).

Two further variables have fostered the pandemic and drive interdependent crises, regardless of the country's economic conditions and geopolitical positioning: widespread internal immigration and a particularly confused system of multilevel governance. In the first wave, Modi's government gave only four hours notice before imposing the lockdown, and many migrant workers decided to leave big cities in a hurry and without precautions, contributing to the spread of the virus to rural regions. In addition, many cities and regions have implemented different restrictions, creating a patchwork of local lockdowns which created confusion and made a single state strategy to contain the pandemic impossible. Most of the measures planned were never implemented due to high levels of contention, between the state and its highly spatialized framework of containment and policing, and the local authorities in charge of the distribution of food and welfare, with serious discretionary whims (Tare 2021). In the first wave, this contention between different levels of government, given that few elected officials were consulted about the containment process (which was seen more as a technocratic problem to be solved by higher tiers of government), "few of them displayed a sense of 'personal investment' in this regard of public health -- often flouting norms of social distancing in order to focus instead on delivering supplies to their clients and constituents, supplying cooked meals" (Kuttaiah 2021: 61), worked to increase a strong ethnic and religious division in solidarity (Ibidem: 76). In this situation, Modi had "nevertheless chosen to establish his new authoritarian regime by preventing foreign donations to NGOs (donations suspected of financing associative activists critical of his party)" (Naudet 2021), with a subsequent massive weakening of local networks of NGOs. As a global result, India has lost its regional influence, with Bangladesh and Nepal turning to China to immunise their populations, Pakistan mocking India with offers of international assistance, and China moving more troops to the border (ivi).

On the other side, social and economic inter-State gaps also matter in interlocking crises. The pandemic is accelerating across South America, and cases are rising in many African countries too. In most low and middle-

income nations, few people have been vaccinated compared with some high-income countries, where elevated vaccination rates are allowing restrictions to be eased. Add to this the fact that many lower-income countries lack the medical capacity to deal with a huge new wave, and a social catastrophe is still in the making. The issue is that to reduce the spread of the virus, the majority of a population needs to be fully immunized with a highly effective vaccine. If the richest countries are not ready to help those with neither the time nor vaccine supplies on their side, then the global community must plan for the worst, not for returning to normal.

4. Depoliticisation, repoliticisation, and subpoliticisation

The first weeks of the pandemic saw public displays of unity: the typical phenomenon of "people rallying behind the flag". Politics placed its trust in science, delegating the definition of measures to be undertaken to manage the spread of the virus to international, supranational and national scientific bodies. Soon, however, the initial "unity" effect that accompanied this depoliticisation phase cracked, and a politicisation of science began to form. By politicisation we mean the inscription of certain actors and/or issues in the arena of professionalised political competition, thanks to both "processes of conformation to the political order and contestation of it" (Deloye and Haegel 2019: 82) through adaptation and/or contestation (Jacquot and Vitale 2014), bearing in mind that "it is not necessary for an issue to be made public for the effects of its politicisation to be felt and to weigh in the definitional process" (Gibert and Henry 2012: 55).

Expert committees and individual scientists clashed over the definition of the risk posed by the virus, and over necessary preventive measures. An effect of their over-exposure in the media, scientists thus became involved in phenomena of spectacularisation and polarisation comparable to those that have long shaped politics. This contributed to shift conflict from the political to the scientific sphere (or to politicise the scientific sphere), thereby feeding a delegitimisation of scientific knowledge.

On one side, we see citizens working with scientists: in many mobilisations, activists and concerned citizens join forces with scientists and experts sensitive to issues of public importance. Science has always been a field of controversy, but as proved by Chesta (2020), today more than ever it is coming up against exposure to the public sphere and the growing desire of a qualified public to participate. In the past, experiences of "popular epidemiology" (Brown 1992) did not stem from a rejection of science, but from an increasingly widespread desire to use science to shed light on reality, contributing by producing more robust and diversified evidence (Chesta 2020).

On the other side, we also see citizens mobilising against science itself. Challenging expert knowledge is rightly considered a fundamental element of populism: traditional epistemic authorities are contested in the name of alternative knowledge authorities.

Developments in political and scientific debate during the pandemic have thus far highlighted a strict correlation between populism, anti-science, denialism and belief in conspiracy theories (DeCleen et al. 2018). This seems to suggest, or rather, to consolidate, claims about the existence of a new cleavage that opposes trust in science and anti-science, reason and emotivity, episteme and doxa, as contrasting elements between the elites and the people (Chou and Budenz 2020).

Diffidence towards scientists, helped along by uncertainty and contrasting messages, increases consensus around populism. It extends the delegitimisation of political and scientific elites. The politicisation of the debate on hydroxychloroquine is a paradigmatic example, with most right-wing leaders supporting its use in the treatment of Covid-19 (Mede and Schäfer 2020; Casarões and Magalhães 2021). It signals the coming of

age of a diffidence towards expert knowledge in all sectors, and by extension towards those professionals that interpret that knowledge: doctors, technicians, scientists, but also journalists, in a sort of victory of doxa over episteme. But this correlation also acts in the opposite direction, in the sense that populist movements, by challenging scientific and health institutions, denying the efficacy of the measures they suggest, and diminishing the extent and the consequences of the pandemic to the point of minimising or even denying it, end up aggravating its effects.

It is interesting to note that if populists tend to see themselves as defenders of the people from the risks of globalisation that place security before freedom, they have argued the opposite during the pandemic: "the populists are choosing not to protect the people against the risks. They instead choose to endorse openness and individual liberties, where the Covid-19 measurements are perceived as limiting such freedoms" (Eslen-Ziya and Giorgi 2021). One entirely new element that has emerged in the pandemic is that it is not only the approaches, visions, choices and behaviour of governments that have deep impacts, but individual and collectively organized behaviour too, whether for or against government measures. Political polarization has moved into everyday life, assuming the form of micro-conflicts over rules for containing the pandemic, appropriate individual behaviour in both private and public spaces and the limits of nudging, what individuals think, information about the pandemic, and, later, over vaccinations. Sceptical, denialist and conspiracist positions have translated into individual behaviour and collective mobilization explicitly oriented to opposing or boycotting protective measures such as the use of protective equipment, social distancing, limits on movement and gatherings (Vieten 2020). As observed in the US case:

The public is polarized on perceptions of scientists and actions to respond to the pandemic. While in 2019 Democrats had greater confidence than Republicans that both medical scientists and scientists in general would act in the best interests of the public, this difference dramatically widened in April 2020, especially with respect to medical scientists,

> as Democratic confidence increased while Republican confidence remained flat (…). With regard to protective actions, a minority of Republicans, compared to a majority of Democrats, felt that social distancing was helping a lot to slow the spread of coronavirus, that there was insufficient testing for coronavirus, and that more people needed to follow social distancing guidelines. (…) These partisan differences in public opinion correlate with observed behavioral differences. Analyses using GPS data from smartphones found that areas with more Republicans exhibited less social distancing than those with more Democrats (Hart et al. 202: 681).

The complex and dynamic relationships between science, politics and everyday life that developed in the pandemic thus go far beyond politics and anti-politics, science and anti-science, liberal democracy and populism. On the contrary, these relationships are at the centre of a reinvention of the social and a re-elaboration of the political where processes of depoliticisation, repoliticisation, subpoliticisation (Beck 1992) and the "democratisation of democracy" are at work in reflexive and discursive ways (Pirni and Raffini 2016).

Distrust in science and technology moves into the spotlight in a climate of growing understanding about the political nature of science, supplanting a view of the scientific sphere as immune from public debate and the presentation of different truth claims. In sum, today we see an anti-positivist stance emerging that is based on the realisation that scientific knowledge is neither infallible nor univocal, and that all human interventions in nature imply risk. But this is also based on the overlapping relationships between science, politics and economics, or, in other words, between scientific interests, instrumental interests and power. Thus, many

perceive decisions that directly impact their lives as imposed by unaccountable powers with no possibility to discuss, control or choose.

Common citizens have never discussed scientific questions as much as they do today, and these discussions take place in a context where science impacts directly on everyday life, the individual and the body - not in the formal and dialectical manner that characterises debates in scientific spheres. But, once again, tensions and conflicts were already present and spreading. They were not caused by the pandemic, but they have been intensified and accelerated by it. Distrust of medicine as a science, and physicians as professionals, has sharpened over the last twenty years (Jones 2017; Wolfensberger and Wrigley 2019), especially among well-educated youth (Morelli and Vitale 2020).

The conflicts that have pitted parts of the population against doctors and scientists, which have become more acute in the debate on vaccines and the possibility of obligatory vaccination, can be traced via the anti-vax movements of the last decade to "NIMBO" (Not in My Body) syndrome (Tipaldo 2019), itself an expression of a postmodern conception of health "related to socio-cultural transformations which have led to a growing public engagement with scientific questions and increasing intersections between expert knowledge and citizens' responses, which foster a demand for non-expert participation in health intervention processes and a less passive attitude towards the professionals' authority" (Lovari 2020). This approach is entirely incompatible with technocracy, vertical decision-making processes, and the imposition of decisions based on dogma whether economic or techno-scientific, which have on many occasions been influenced by economic and political interests despite apparent objectivity.

In the media, the phenomenon of "vaccine hesitancy" (Calnan and Douglass 2020) - which already existed about obligatory vaccinations for children, and includes the more hardline "Anti-vax" position which links conspiracy theories and anti-science – is bolstered by the spread of disinformation. Vaccine hesitancy is not common among individuals with lower education levels, but a position taken by individuals and groups with medium and high education levels (Lello 2020) who take a critical approach to science and its relationships with political and economic interests. Worries about the direct impact of science on their bodies, and the bodies of their children, are fed by some cases where the imposition of technical innovation has turned out to be damaging and produced unforeseen effects. Doubt, the desacralisation of science, distrust of pharmaceutical companies and political institutions converge in claims for more transparency and more public debate. In other words, for the democratisation of choice based on awareness of the political as well as the scientific character of vaccines.

Adopting a broader perspective, then, "vaccination controversy is ultimately a controversy about what it is to be a modern human, including questions about the responsibility one has to oneself, one's family and community, and the human community overall, as well as to the earth and its sustainability" (Hausman 2019: 3). It expresses worries about "government intrusion on the bodies of citizens" (ivi: 52) in a context of widespread distrust in political and economic elites.

According to Sanders and Burnett, modern vaccine hesitancy has neoliberal roots: "the denial of the social contract in favor of individual pursuits and in direct rejection of public health as a collective and worthwhile endeavor (…) the dismissal of community welfare in favor of the pursuit of individual prosperity (…), the individualistic understandings of health and the public (and) the rejection of state authority" (Sanders and Burnett 2019: 152). These themes emerged before the pandemic and had already generated ethical dilemmas. The current crisis magnifies the debates, which act as litmus tests for the relationship between the individual and society.

Let us think about the relationship between individual rights and collective responsibilities, the balance between the right to health and safeguarding the economy, or intergenerational solidarity. Here, the very different responses to the pandemic in China have often been compared to those in the West, and the apparently superior efficacy of authoritarian regimes compared to western democracies to impose containment measures based on the limitation of individual freedoms has been underlined. These comparisons also contrasted western individualism with the communitarianism or collectivism of Asian societies. The real question is rather more complex than a superficial contrasting of democracy and authoritarianism, or individualism and collectivism. It is about the forms that individualism assumes, and the redefinition of the individual-society relationship.

Leccardi and Volontè (2017) suggest that we distinguish individualism defined in terms of selfishness, broken social links, and atomisation, from a 'new' individualism on the basis of which "innovative social links, forms of unconventional political participation, a new attitude to social cooperation" are generated (ibidem: 12). This type of individualism, also described as based on solidarity (Cuzzocrea and Collins 2015), as 'publicly connected' (Raini and Wellmann 2012), or more frequently as 'networked individualism' (Barwick and Le Galès 2020; Vacca et al. 2021) stands in clear contrast to the imagined effects of atomised individualism, where we are reduced to acting only to maximise our own selfish interests. Yet it also stands apart from a view where individualism is contrasted with a return to the community based on the rejection of pluralism and cosmopolitanism – such as populism.

As far as rethinking the relationship between the individual and the collective sphere is concerned, it seems that we cannot assume the weakening of the intersubjective dimension but rather its strengthening, a "socialised self-conscience" (Martuccelli 2017) which profoundly changes the relationship between the individual and the collective, and thus the nature of the political. On this theme, more than twenty years ago Alberto Melucci proposed some reflections which now seem prophetic if we apply them to the dynamics that characterise the current pandemic crisis.

> The problems of the individual have become collective problems precisely because they involve, on the one hand, the manipulation of individual identity by the power structure, and the cultural representation of needs as an individual concern on the other. Analysis of the increasing 'socialization' of the individual dimension and, conversely, of the 'individualization' of social problems is made more difficult by the dominant apparatuses' simultaneous attempt to counter and offset this very tendency. There is a push towards de-differentiation, to the reduction of all problems to the level of the individual taken as an atomized entity. Forms of power are transformed, and one witnesses an attempt at psychologization and generalized medicalization of society, with the purpose of absorbing every potential collective conflict that arises around the problems of identity by reducing them to the individualistic dimension. The construction of personal identity becomes a potentially conflictual process in which definitions imposed by external powers clash with the self-realization needs of individuals. But if the sphere of identity is confined within pure psychological or medical categories and submitted to the treatment of specialized apparatuses, its conflictual potential is reduced to a psychological or medical problem (Melucci 1996: 105).

Melucci takes a stand on discontinuities. Other authors, closer to the Weberian tradition, come to similar conclusions, but in terms of a deepening and widening of the reflexivity of social action as typical of a highly educated society in late modernity, well beyond the western worlds of welfare capitalism. What is unique in the social theory of Melucci is his identification of a field of tensions between (1) risks of the atomisation of political action, the division into silos of collective conflicts, the exaltation of a "quasi-biological particularism" (Melucci 2000) , a backsliding in the rules of the game toward pre-social dimensions; (2) the

opportunities for a reinvention of the political, which takes its form from the centrality of everyday life and the body - and not necessarily in a progressive and inclusionary sense (see Eliasoph 1999).

The reconfiguration of the nexus between science, politics, and daily life, the awareness of the irreducible complexity that characterises it, and conscience of the risks that flow from it, pushes us to reflect on the centrality of public communication for the democratic management of complexity. As a place for self-explanation and critique (Habermas 1998), where publics and counter-publics meet, a place for the collective construction of meaning, the elaboration of shared representations and challenges to power. Communication is a crucial space where the different dimensions of this crisis have taken shape. The communicative crisis (Coombs 2020) feeds back into all the dimensions of the crisis: health, political, economic, and social. It is the stage where the epistemic crisis and the crisis of political legitimacy, and thus the crisis of the legitimacy of expert knowledge, play out. The crisis of communication thus offers a strategic vantage point to investigate the broad and deep crisis of the relationship between individuals and institutions (defined here in a sociological sense as not limited to political institutions).

6. The crisis of public communication

On March 11 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak a global pandemic. A few months later, it declared the existence of an "infodemic", defined as "an overabundance of information" mixing facts, rumours, and speculation, which produces disinformation and misinformation (WHO 2020).

Disinformation can be defined as an attempt to deliberately mislead others for strategic or, perhaps, pathological purposes, through a systematic, intentional disruption of authoritative information flows. 'Misinformation', meanwhile, refers to unintentionally wrong or false information (Pennycook et al. 2021), usually generated when real and plausible information is mixed. Both create uncertainty and anxiety and may be "harmful to people's physical and mental health; increase stigmatization; threaten precious health gains; and lead to poor observance of public health measures, thus reducing their effectiveness and endangering countries' ability to stop the pandemic", finally "heightening the risk of conflict, violence and human rights violations; and threatening long-terms prospects for advancing democracy, human rights and social cohesion" (WHO 2020).

The central location for the development of these dynamics is digital media. These platforms supply fertile ground for communicative dynamics to develop which then, because of the way they are structured, spread through the net and social media platforms in particular. These spaces promote the multiplication of sources and dynamics of disintermediation. Users find themselves over-exposed to a multiplicity of informative content which tends to take a horizontal form with the figure of the "prosumer", at once producer and consumer of news, at its centre. Disintermediation and horizontalisation do not transform the public sphere in a way that brings it closer to the habermasian ideal of rational debate, where dynamics that distort and manipulate are neutralised. Rather, they fragment and develop in ways that are less visible, and thus more ambiguous and subtle. It is generally accepted that individuals tend to shut themselves away in information bubbles, whether we are talking about the traditional mediatized public sphere dominated by newspapers and television or social media. They tend to select content that confirms their own views rather than exposing themselves to content that challenges them. In these bubbles, cognitive dynamics enter into play that tend to lead back to messages received within predefined cognitive schemes. Users, in short, are overexposed to messages that confirm and

reinforce their opinions, creating the "echo-chamber" effect (Flaxman et al 2016). Digital communication reinforces these dynamics, but also fragments and anonymises. This happens not only through the multiplication of information sources, but also because algorithms mean that not only is it the user who selects the content, but the content that "chooses" the user. This amplifies dynamics of fragmentation in the public sphere, and thus the polarisation of opinions. Paradoxically, then, the exponential increase in communication flows and the potential multiplication of sources creates a barrier rather than a boon for pluralist communication oriented to dialogue. It creates a balkanization effect that feeds the tendency to identify enemies, scapegoats, and conspiracy theories, with negative effects on the quality of public debate and on trust in institutions, and between and among citizens and groups of citizens. We are witnessing an 'emotional turn' that "underpins a critique of the public sphere as unduly rationalistic in constructing our expectations of how citizens think and act politically" (Schlesinger 2020: 1551).

The spread of misinformation and disinformation (fake news), rumours, conspiracy theories and other "mendacious or factual blends" are among the main expressions of what has been defined as "post-truth". Post-truth describe a context where "facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief": it is a condition that in turn feeds uncertainty. Social groups experiencing processes of marginalisation and deprivation are among the most exposed, and a propension to disinformation and conspiracy is associated with a lower trust in science and scientists, a lower trust in journalists and the mainstream media, a lower trust in government (Roozenbeek et al. 2020), and a lower capacity for the critical and autonomous management of complexity.

Fragmentation and polarization of public opinion, and the growing gap among contrasting definitions of reality, are another trend fed by the coincidence of emergency, surprise and uncertainty (Halbertal 2020). To affirm that post-truth is an effect of the communicative logic that characterizes digital media would mean affirming technological determinism without considering the social, political and cultural facts that underpin it.

> Post-truth especially refers to a sociopolitical condition perceived as rifer than ever before with dishonesty and distrust, inaccuracies or false knowledge, all corresponding to a crisis of shared trusted adjudicating authorities. Systematic deception and lack of authority are furthermore reproduced by and contribute to a problem of distrust (…) the public problems for which PT is shorthand are epistemic (false knowledge, competing truth claims); fiduciary (distrust of society-wide authoritative truth-tellers, trust in micro-truth-tellers); and ethico-moral (conscious disregard for factual evidence—bullshitting—or intentional, strategic falsehoods/lying—dishonesty), the latter of which is often bracketed or abstracted into institutional logics of political strategy (Harsin 2018: 5).

Because of the radical uncertainty that accompanies it, the pandemic represents a perfect opportunity for the exponential growth of post-truth. Once again, the post-truth era pre-dates the pandemic. The literature identifies different stages: The 2016 US presidential election (Bovet and Makse 2019); the Brexit debate (Marshall and Drieschova 2020); the spread of the anti-vaccination movement (Adel Ali and Pastore Celentano 2017); and the myth of the 'sea taxis' and accompanying criminalisation of NGO rescue boats during the 2015 migration crisis in the Mediterranean (Giorgi and Vitale 2017). Events like the Cambridge Analytica scandal, or the presumed spreading of disinformation by Russia to manipulate political debates, have fed the debate on the impact of fake news and control over data on the democratic process, as well as debates about the control exerted over information flows by large corporations like Facebook and Google as well as national states.

Misinformation and disinformation are not in fact produced (only) by spontaneous dynamics. They are ever more artfully spread in pursuit of political and economic interests. We could say that, accompanied by hopes

and illusions about its pluralisation and democratisation, the public sphere in the era of digital media has provided fertile ground for the extension, strengthening, and dissimulation of processes of the colonisation and manipulation of action that, according to Habermas, already characterised the public sphere dominated by the mass media. Be that as it may, in 2020 25% of the top videos on Covid-19 on YouTube contained misleading information (Ofcom 2020, cfr Roozenbeek et al 2020).

According to Bennet and Persh (2018), if the spread of social media "has increased the dispersion and cacophony of public voices" (cfr. Dahlgren 2006: 151) "these challenges to the ideal of shared communication are magnified by declining confidence in institutions such as parties, press, and legislatures, which served as authoritative information hubs in idealized modern democracies (Bennett and Persh 2018: 245).

Infodemics, the uncontrolled spread of fake news, and the declining quality of public debate are all symptoms of the crisis in the relationship between individuals and institutions which tend to reinforce one another. As Bennett e Livingston (2018: 122) put it, "the spread of disinformation can be traced to growing legitimacy problems in many democracies. Declining citizen confidence in institutions undermines the credibility of official information in the news and opens publics to alternative information sources". The web and social media are the places where these alternative sources are available and it is here, in a context of the multiplication of more or less credible sources, and an overlapping between what is true, partially true, credible, and intentionally false, that deliberate strategies of disinformation find space to operate. The Brexit campaign and Trump's election campaign showed how these were staged by "both nationalist (primarily radical right) and foreign (commonly Russian) countries, as strategies to undermine institutional legitimacy and destabilize centre parties, governments and elections" (ivi). In a word, to disrupt normal democratic order.

Aware that using the suffix 'post' serves to indicate something that no longer exists rather than to interpret what does, the concept of post-truth points to a crisis of trust mechanisms and the legitimacy of knowledge, just as post-democracy describes a weakening of trust and legitimacy with regard to representation (Crouch 2004) that generates cracks in the democratic process and feeds technocratic currents on the one hand and populism on the other.

Remaining in the field of the 'post', the advent of post-truth has been argued to herald a "post-public sphere" characterized by a high level of fragmentation (Sunstein 2017). Post-truth "actually designates a movement away from a previous understanding of mediated politics. Yet, this is coupled with an open question about what comes next" (Schlesinger 2020: 553), where "relatively extensive, shared and stable public spheres" have been replaced by a "wild west" of "volatility, fragmentation and polarization', with rewritten norms, values and rules of engagement" (Davis 2019: 185-187). Similarly, Bennett and Pfetsch (2018: 250) define the "disrupted public sphere" as characterised by "diminished citizen attention, hybrid media systems, the rise of undemocratic movements and parties, and networked, often polarized, political information flows".

The crisis of public communication is thus a constitutive element of the crisis of democracy, but more generally of the crisis of the relationship between politics, science (and knowledge), and daily life. The red thread that runs through the collection of crises discussed here is the crisis of trust in key institutions of modernity: the democratic state, science and technology, the market. This distrust is not, per se, a cause but a symptom of a series of pathologies attacking the dominant social, political and economic model. In sum, the pandemic crisis has generated a condition of extreme uncertainty that has acted as a multiplier for a series of complex and ambiguous dynamics of redefinition of the relationships between science, politics and everyday life. Truth claims and legitimacy based on truth claims are pivotal under these dynamics. For these reasons, the pandemic made the deep epistemic crisis underlying the political crisis evident. Both find a space for expression in the crisis of public communication.

At the same time it is risky to subsume all critical approaches to scientific knowledge and the relationship between science, politics and everyday life under the heading of anti-science, or pseudo-science. Some critiques constitute counter knowledge that rightly questions the claims to objectivity and neutrality of science and refutes the claim that criticisms of "mainstream" science are illegitimate because they are uniformly anti-scientific. The spread of critical stances on the relationships between science and politics cannot be traced to anti-politics and populism alone. At the opposite end of the spectrum to populism we find technocracy: the idea that spaces for discussion, critique and choice should be minimal given the objectivity of technical choices. Technocracy is rooted, as discussed, in subpolitical connotations. Any simplistic contrast between the responsible citizen (civil and rational) who blindly and unquestioningly follows the rules laid down by political and health authorities, and the irresponsible citizen (uncivil and irrational) who flouts the rules because influenced by disinformation and/or because of selfishness, must then be resisted and refuted. However, in recent years many democratic experiments designed to solve complex controversies have been devised (Eyal 2019), including "exclusion, or a "boundary-work" that confines controversy to technocratic expert judgment; inclusion, or the extension of controversy to the participation of lay people in order to improve transparency; mechanical objectivity, or the search for objective and standardized procedures that reduce human judgment and error; and outsourcing, or a strategy of expertise spin-of (a category that frequently intersects with the previous ones)" (Chesta 2021: 2).

7. Dealing with different types of knowledge?

All of these questions about the crisis in how individuals relate to one another, to politics, to science, to information and more are not new questions, as we have explored thus far. Their importance is however amplified by the pandemic. Where, then, can we look for ideas about how to work through these dilemmas? One area where some similar dynamics have played out is in debates about the environment.

First, questions of knowledge and the contestation of knowledge are at the centre of environmental politics, including questions about how environmental degradation is linked to the pandemic. As discussed, the changes driven by the globalized economy in terms of anthropocentric climate change and the destruction of habitats have been linked to the emergence of the virus in the first place, while the ways that people and goods move in the globalized economy contributed to the spread of the virus and its escalation to pandemic status. In addition, issues of justice and environmental racism (see e.g. Agyeman et al) are central to how different groups in societies have suffered from the virus: environmental racism concerns the differential impacts of environmental damage on minority groups, who are more likely to live closer to sources of serious pollution that cause complicating underlying health conditions such as asthma, as well as living in neighbourhoods with scarce community health services, reduced access to emergency care, hospitals, poor infrastructure, and a high proportion of residents employed in essential work that is usually harder to carry out at home a distance, within regions characterized by high connectivity (Amdaoud et al. 2021; Florida et al. 2020). Marginalized groups such as refugees have also suffered disproportionately compared to wealthier population groups (Casaglia 2021). Beyond the micro level, climate change has also been named among interacting factors that influence the uneven impact and spread of the virus (Horton 2020). Finally, the lockdowns of the pandemic had clear environmental effects, albeit limited in real impact since they have proven relatively short-lived. The 're-wilding' effects, seen in more heart-warming examples as foraging goats at the Welsh seaside and more, also

draw attention to the importance of access to nature for human wellbeing under the stress of isolation. Green spaces became prime commodities, allowing safe conviviality but also this link to nature.

Overall, in the pandemic our failure to address the planetary emergency and the range of damage that can and is flowing from it, was driven home on multiple fronts and revealed to impact the most intimate aspects of daily health. Most importantly, perhaps, the impacts of environmental harm were experienced in direct (albeit differentiated) ways by social groups across the planet, including those more privileged either socially, geographically, or both, that had previously been more sheltered from the direct evidence and experience of climate change. In that sense, the pandemic may prove central to drive change in how we address climate change and other environmental issues. Some small but encouraging signs are forthcoming, with the US and UK (who hold the presidency of the next meeting of the UNFCCC) calling for steps to contain global warming to 1.5 degrees C in line with research that emerged after the Paris Agreement had originally called for a limit of 2 degrees C.

Time will tell if the crucial 26th COP of the UNFCCC scheduled to take place later this year in Glasgow will mark a change in attitudes and finally close the 'rulebook' of the Paris Agreement. Yet evidence of some change in the discourses of environmental politics, pushed by rising demands from organised civil society and social movements for environmental justice, do appear to be emerging at least in the language and stated aims of recent state programmes, including the European Green Deal, and talk of a 'green recovery'. This may be greenwashing or lip service, yet changing language is a sign that powerful actors have come to recognise the need to at least be seen to pay attention to such matters, which may lead to their actual persuasion and action (Checkel 2005).

Beyond this, the governance of the environment and debates in environmental politics also deal with many issues that are similar to those emerging from the pandemic, and could provide us with useful points of departure when considering whether and how the pandemic crisis could be used as an opportunity for change.

To begin with, the crisis of communication as a crisis of democracy during the pandemic finds many echoes in the story of the planetary emergency. Looking at environmental governance and activism we see many of the same dilemmas playing out. The climate crisis requires urgent action, leading some to call for some kind of benevolent dictatorship or eco-authoritarianism in order to achieve the kind of transformational change needed, and which international multilateral diplomacy and states have been unable to deliver thus far. Most, fortunately, refute this reductionist approach that creates a false dichotomy between democracy and effective action (whether action is directed towards mitigation or managing collapse in more socially just ways). Work on ecological democracy and how to achieve participation in an area with a clearly global reach and implications has thus been the subject of much discussion in recent years (e.g. Stevenson and Dryzek 2012). Suggestions are made on the basis of claims that could easily also apply to health rights: that including more societal groups in making decisions with global effects will mean better decisions, that will more likely be accepted, and be more effectively implemented (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2019). A system of global decision making that makes space for deliberation between groups has been advanced as a way forward in environmental governance, where political discourses (apart from climate change denial) may have areas of overlap and complementarity that allow their splicing in ways that allow for local autonomy in natural resource governance within polycentric systems (Ostrom 2010), through legal pluralism (Bavikatte 2014), and through new spaces for civil society participation to allow global forms of deliberation (Stevenson and Dryzek 2012). Brought to the adjacent arena of health, a key idea from these suggested solutions is to build systems that allow autonomy, but not where it feeds unjust distribution. Care for the sick, for example, may need to involve different types of formal and informal actors (hospitals, families, traditional healers) – the importance is to

have a system that allows for local and culturally appropriate solutions without closing off spaces for care or access to others. While vaccine distribution demands a more top down approach, the different health impacts of the pandemic – from suffering with the virus, its long-term effects, but also the suffering caused to mental health and wellbeing – underline the need to address care in different ways. The article by Introini and colleagues in this Special Issue discusses such grassroots approaches to community care and service provision in this vein.

Crisis as a potential moment for change also applies to the institutions of global environmental governance, which have also been through numerous crises, from the continued controversies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, stretching from the Kyoto Protocol to the rulebook for the 2015 Paris Agreement, with the periodic withdrawal and reappearance of the United States and the ongoing tensions between states of the global north and south, and a continued abysmal track record in terms of actually achieving any of the targets set. Here too, the importance of participation and conflict in changing governance approaches has long been discussed. As disappointment with high level multilateralism crystallized at certain key meetings (the Rio +20 summit and the 2009 meeting of the parties of the UNFCCC in particular), organized civil society groups both engaged in more transnational governance experiments to address environmental harm in more immediate and concrete ways on the one hand (Stevenson 2018), and turned back to social movement tactics and actors and local action to build a new frame of climate and environmental justice on the other (della Porta and Parks 2014). This last, as already suggested, feeds into cultural and discursive change that can now be read in changing political language in global environmental governance – though again, how effective this might turn out to be in real terms remains to be seen.

Finally, environmental governance also provides an example of an area where the use of science and the politicization of knowledge and truth has long been apparent (Callon et al. 2009). Although not so informative for dealing with questions of post-truth, denialism and conspiracy theories, it has always confronted climate change negationists (Lewandowsky 2020). Besides, work on environmental governance does provide some useful points to consider in terms of how to involve different types of knowledge in deliberative hybrid forums (Callon 1999) and, even more, in decision-making (at least in theory). The starting point for such reasoning is in the literature on science and technology studies and work that applies the tenets of social sciences to the ways in which science shapes governance. This literature reminds us of an important lesson. First, the principles of peer reviewed science, where scientists are discouraged from defining anything as 'truth' but instead to strive to disprove what has not yet been disproved in order to come as close as possible to something resembling 'truth', are hard to then communicate to the public (Dessler and Parson 2019). The risk is that scientists either compromise their rigour to achieve public communication, or fail to communicate effectively (ibid.), including many elements related to uncertainty (Lascoumes 2010) and incommensurability (Centemeri 2015). The translation of scientific knowledge as defined by the Enlightenment scientific method, in other words, is inherently difficult. Similar problems have been all too clear in the pandemic. Into the bargain, research shows that the politicization of science has negative effects on public trust on topics such as health (Adashi et al. 2019) as well as climate change (Incropera 2016; Beck and Mahony 2018; Vraga et al. 2018). During the first wave of the pandemic, Farjam et al. (2021) found that behavioural responses to calls for public compliance could well be sensitive to information signals and the source of communication: when scientific experts, alone without politicians, recommended anti-contagion measures, citizens "were more sensitive to pro-social motivations, unlike whenever these measures were recommended by politicians and scientific experts together", or by politicians alone.

At the same time, however, most governments and powerful actors assume that this version of science (which follows a scientific method originating in the European thought of the Enlightenment) is the only one, and that it is pure and somehow apolitical (see the discussion earlier). Yet equating this model of science with the pure truth excludes many other types of knowledge that are equally based on long-term observation and knowledge passed through generations, though sometimes through more oral traditions. These types of knowledge that are not codified in ways recognized by the traditions of the global north, and which may be crucial to justice in environmental decision-making, are often closed out by systems of government and courts that exclude them from the definition of 'science' (or indeed 'truth') (Choudry and Kapoor 2013). This underlines that science, too, is socially constructed, ideological, and deployed in politics.

Some glimpse of hope, or at least a beginning towards the inclusion of different knowledges or competing theories in decision-making comes from global environmental governance. Though very far from inclusive and just, Jasanoff and Long Martello underline that this is an area where there has been a clear and quantifiable shift away from the idea of 'science' towards one of 'knowledge' (2004). Crucially, they discuss this shift not in terms of recognizing different, competing claims as equally acceptable truths, but instead in terms of recognizing the array of valid and important knowledge from locally-lived experiences that need to find spaces for respect in decisions with global reach – something that different bodies of global environmental governance, and the Convention on Biological Diversity in primis, has tried (albeit imperfectly) to begin to implement (ibid). An important plank in achieving visibility for this kind of local knowledge comes in different shapes of community activism, whether more legal in form (Parks 2020) or in the form of practical networks for perpetuating important local knowledge (e.g. on seed propagation) (Tsioumani 2021). In this view, participation and conflict presents itself once more as crucial to incorporating varieties of knowledge – but importantly it moves beyond the idea of needing to establish some type of universal 'truth' that should lie at the heart of a decision and apply to the myriad ways in which it should be implemented. As proved by Laura Centemeri (2009), different types of "translation, mediation and composition (at epistemic and moral levels)" are needed in order to create the conditions "for a truly inclusive and democratic public deliberation on environmental damage, its definition, repairing and prevention." Rather, knowledge of local realities can be expressed from the bottom up to resolve a problem established as existing by scientific studies. In this framework, knowledge is defined as constructive of local to global justice, not as the driver of division and protectionism.

8. Towards a new social contract?

Ten years from now, in the less Eurocentric history books, we may look back in admiration at China's success in containing the pandemic (assuming that China's declaration of victory over the viral enemy is accurate), and in horror at the failures of the US and the EU. Global viruses often provoke a sinister synergy between disease and malnutrition, which suppresses poor people's immune responses to infection and produces rampant bacterial, as well as viral, pneumonia. This happened during the Spanish flu pandemic, when several years of drought and food shortages preconditioned the death of at least 50 million people worldwide, it is happening now with Covid-19: "in Lagos, Kigali, Addis Ababa and Kinshasa no one knows (and won't know for a long time because of the absence of testing) how it may synergize with local health conditions and diseases" (Davis 2020: 9). But it is also happening in the wealthiest part of the world: the inability of Trump's government to contain the virus should not surprise us, given the repeated breakdowns in US frontline

healthcare in the last twenty years. In 2009 and 2018, for example, a seasonal flu was enough to overwhelm hospitals across the country, exposing the drastic shortage of hospital beds after years of profit-driven cutbacks to in-patient capacity. The healthcare crisis originates with the corporate offensive that brought Ronald Reagan to power and "converted leading Democrats into neoliberal mouthpieces" (Davis 2020: 10), but the political responsibility for the current deconstruction of US healthcare belongs jointly to Republicans and Democrats, as both have refused to rebuild safety nets shredded in the 2008 recession budget cuts. As a result, local and state health departments – the vital first line of defence – have 25 percent fewer staff today than they did before Black Monday thirteen years ago and, over the past decade, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's budget has fallen by ten percent in real terms. As "the ultimate attack level", Donald Trump shut down the White House pandemic office – a directorate established by Obama after the 2014 Ebola outbreak to ensure a rapid and well-coordinated national response to new epidemics – and three months before the outbreak had the brilliant idea of closing the PREDICT project, a pandemic early-warning system and foreign-aid programme established after the avian flu in 2005 and able to discover more than 1,000 viruses among those of ongoing public health concern. What will the outcomes of the pandemic look like in a country where 45 percent of the workforce is currently denied the paid sick leave, where Republican states have refused to enact the provision of the Affordable Care Act (expanding Medicaid to the working poor), and where the for-profit nursing home industry houses 2.5 million elderly Americans, maximizing profits by paying low wages, under-staffing and illegal cost-cutting (Rowland and Whoriskey 2020: 10)? A sort of "medical Katrina" is justifiably feared (Davis 2020: 11).

Covid-19 has often been described as a war that engaged the entire planet. Net of rhetorical exaggerations, the metaphor is justified by some similarities: soldiers in the Great War contracted the Spanish flu virus in the trenches and unwittingly transmitted it to the rest of the population when they returned home. In the same way the nursing home workers – obliged by their low wages to work multiple jobs – have transformed hundreds nursing homes into Covid-19 hotspots. If it is a war, however, it is impossible not to extend the metaphor to note how "mankind's army" has presented itself unarmed: few soldiers, due to Medicare understaffing and cost-cutting, and poor medical infrastructure, due to "Big Pharma's" abdication of research and development of new antibiotics and antivirals. "Of the eighteen largest pharmaceutical companies, fifteen have totally abandoned the field. Heart medicines, addictive tranquilizers and treatments for male impotence are profit leaders, not the defences against hospital infections, emergent diseases and traditional tropical killers. A universal vaccine for influenza – that is to say, a vaccine that targets the immutable parts of the virus's surface proteins – has been a possibility for decades, but never profitable enough to be a priority" (Davis 2020: 13). Major pharmaceutical companies have little or no interest in non-remunerative research on infectious diseases, such as the whole class of Coronaviruses that have been well known since the 1960s. As a matter of fact, they rarely invest in prevention, nor prepare for health crises: they prefer to design cures. "The sicker we are, the more they earn" (Harvey 2020).

Another factor in losing this "war" is the inability of the generals: Covid-19 has shown how capitalist globalization is biologically unsustainable in the absence of an international public health infrastructure. Both the virus and the economic lockdowns needed to combat it have shone a blinding light on existing inequalities, and created new ones, some of which we have already discussed here. Overnight, millions of jobs and livelihoods have been lost in hospitality, leisure and related sectors, while better paid knowledge workers often face only the nuisance of working from home. Worse, those in low-wage jobs who can still work have often risked their lives, as carers and healthcare support workers, but also as shelf stackers, delivery drivers and cleaners. Governments' extraordinary budget support for the economy, while necessary, will in some ways

make matters worse: countries that have allowed an irregular and precarious labour market to persist are finding it particularly hard to channel financial help to workers in such insecure employment.

At the same time, in several countries, lockdown restrictions have brought to the fore a critique of "public policies, academic certainties and value judgements" underlying the "non-productive" and "low-skilled" label attributed to many personal service jobs, whose functions have now come to be seen as "essential" (Palier 2020). These are precarious, low-paid jobs in service infrastructure and care services, including education and health (Hassel and Palier 2021). Since the early 2000s, competitiveness strategy has sought to keep the costs of these service jobs as low as possible in order to keep export prices attractive, and to provide an environment conducive to wage moderation in export industries, including in what is now called the knowledge economy (Morel 2015).

Meanwhile, widespread monetary loosening by central banks will help the asset-rich. But in the background underfunded public services are collapsing. Still following the metaphor of the war against the pandemic, we have to admit that the way we wage the conflict is benefitting some at the expense of others. It is not cynical to say that the victims of Covid-19 have overwhelmed those who survive, and who are penalized, asked to suspend their education (the young) and forgo precious income (the workers). Sacrifices are inevitable, but every society must demonstrate how it will offer restitution to those who bear the heaviest burden of national efforts.

Even the Financial Times, the true bible of neo-liberalism, admitted more than a year ago that the economic situation was serious: "Radical reforms – reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades – will need to be put on the table. Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy. They must see public services as investments rather than liabilities, and look for ways to make labour markets less insecure. Redistribution will again be on the agenda; the privileges of the elderly and wealthy in question. Policies until recently considered eccentric, such as basic income and wealth taxes, will have to be in the mix" (Financial Times Europe 2020: 8). At the same time, the economic newspaper accompanies the metaphorical mainstream plot, arguing that the taboo-breaking measures governments are taking to sustain businesses and incomes during the lockdown have been rightly compared to the sort of wartime economy western countries have not experienced for seven decades.

The analogy, however, ends here. Every major conflict since the nineteenth century has brought advances in rights: the extension of voting power, the emancipation of women, public schools, pensions, higher wages. These achievements were not obtained through genteel concessions by governments, but from the effort of great social mobilizations: it was the "acceleration of History" produced by the war, an example of that "push" of which Lenin spoke.

It has been argued that the immediate political fall-out of the Coronavirus crisis has been the substitution of the demagogy and incompetence of populists with the benefits of professionals and expertise (Fukuyama 2020). Bolsonaro is floundering, while Trump failed to lead. By contrast, Merkel had done impressively well, and in France Macron has struck the right balance between confinement and opening up services and businesses. According to Fukuyama, Covid-19 has lanced the boil of populism and suggests a correlation between being a populist and… doing badly. In a global perspective and under an empirical point of view, does this claim stand up? It is not so clear. Firstly, figures for Covid-19 are generally unreliable and rarely comparable, as gross numbers merely single out the largest of the hard-hit countries.

"The more meaningful metric is per capita deaths" (Watkins 2020: 5): as of June 1st, 2021, the highest mortality rates are in eastern Europe: especially in Hungary, at 3,080 deaths per million, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2,842) Czechia (2,808), North Macedonia (2,603), Bulgaria (2,569), Montenegro (2,523) and

Slovakia (2,264). Brazil (2,175), Belgium (2,146) and Italy (2,090) come in just under these, followed by Poland (1,957) and Croatia (1,970), with the UK (1,873) and USA (1,834) doing worse than Spain (1,710) and France (1,677).

Conceptually, too, the move from ideological stance to epidemiological competence, and finally to electoral outcome ("being a populist and doing badly") elides Covid-19's complexity and ignores its differential impacts. By way of example, there are some countries and governments (China, Iran, Italy) which have been at the frontline, grappling with the virus at its start with little knowledge of what they were up against. Moreover, the virus has been playing out across vertiginously unequal social landscapes, set within a hierarchical inter-state system, with huge national variations in medical, social and administrative resources and with general public health striated by accumulated privileges built up over generations. In the past decades, major crises have caused major consequences, usually unforeseen: "the Great Depression spurred isolationism, nationalism, fascism, and World War II – but also led to the New Deal, the rise of the United States as a global superpower, and eventually decolonization. The 9/11 attacks produced two failed American interventions, the rise of Iran, and a new form of Islamic radicalism. The 2008 financial crisis generated a surge in anti establishment populism that replaced leaders across the globe" (Fukuyama 2020: 26). Unlike these, however, Covid-19 is "the first crisis within a crisis", embedded in the competitive dynamics of a global capitalist economy that had not yet recovered from the shock of 2008. It becomes inevitable, therefore, that we must consider the exogenous variable of Coronavirus in the longue durée of interactions with economic and political dynamics. Both economic and health crises confirm that the capitalist economy as a spiral of endless expansion and growth is over. The existing model of capital accumulation was in trouble before the spread of Covid-19: "Protest movements were occurring almost everywhere (from Santiago to Beirut), many of which were focused on the fact that the dominant economic model was not working well for the mass of the population. This neoliberal model is increasingly resting on fictitious capital and a vast expansion in the money supply and debt creation" (Harvey 2020). As a result, the dominant economic frame was not able "to absorb and survive" the pandemic's inevitable impacts: the blockages and disruptions in the continuity of flows of money, commodities and people caused the breakdown of an economic system in which commodities not only had to be sold, but had to be sold in time. Avoiding cyclical pandemics is impossible, just as it is unrealistic to "de-risk" financial economy. From the markets' point of view, it becomes essential to understand how long each pandemic will last and how deep the economic damage will be.

As an example, SARS turned out to be fairly quickly contained, with a low global impact, even though it had a high death rate. When Covid-19 appeared, a common reaction was to depict it as a repeat of SARS, thus rendering the panic redundant. The fact that the epidemic raged in China, which quickly and ruthlessly moved to contain its impacts, also led the rest of the world to erroneously treat the problem as something going on "over there" out of sight and mind (accompanied by some troubling markers of anti-Chinese xenophobia). Public authorities and healthcare systems were caught short-handed almost everywhere: forty years of neoliberalism across both Americas and Europe had left the public totally exposed and ill-prepared to face a public health crisis of this sort, even though previous scares linked to the above-mentioned diseases had provided abundant warnings as well as cogent lessons as to what would be needed to be done. In many parts of the capitalist world, local governments and regional or state authorities had been starved of funding thanks to a policy of austerity designed to fund tax cuts and subsidies for corporations and the rich.

It is obvious and perhaps even symptomatic that countries taking measures which could be defined as "draconian" in order to confine the virus geographically have performed better than those displaying more fanatical support for the neoliberal paradigm (the US and Italy, for example). Besides, while in any exponential

growth process there is an inflection point beyond which the rising mass becomes out of control, every day proves costly in terms of human lives and waiting for favourable polls can be very dangerous, as Trump and Bolsonaro have shown.

It is not the role of this *Partecipazione e Conflitto* Special Issue to decide if it is still worth living in a liberal-democratic country during a pandemic: it is the same as wondering whether social ownership of healthcare provision and the democratization of pharmaceutical industries is necessary, or "only" an updated New Deal. Here, however, we cannot help but ask if – unlike other crises in the past – the new social contract produced in post-Covid society will increase social rights and provide economic benefits for subaltern populations. As highlighted by Patrick Le Galès (2016: 168) "with or without neoliberalism, globalized liberal capitalism is increasingly structuring the international order and the transformation of cities, including inequalities". Despite institutional calls for national mobilization, we are not really all in this pandemic together: infectious diseases do recognise class and other social barriers and boundaries. But the economic and social consequences of this pandemic are different from those of the past, because there is no political left today.

Covid-19 has highlighted the disappearance of international solidarity, just when it was most necessary to drive a massive scaling up of the production of test kits, protective supplies and lifeline drugs for free distribution to poor countries; just when answers other than a grotesque rush to vaccinate our country, our family, ourselves before all others.

9. The special issue

The articles in this Special Issue are organised around two main subtopics linked to how the pandemic relates to the dynamics of existing crises: the governance of the Covid-19 pandemic, and political scenarios after the pandemic.

Francesco Amoretti, Adriano Cozzolino and Diego Giannone open the issue with a piece focusing on the fiscal policy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and changes seen since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. As one of the world's central international financial institutions, the IMF provides an ideal case study to reflect on whether and how fiscal policy has changed thus far as a result of the far-reaching economic and social impacts of the pandemic, and begin to trace the outlines of new future directions and breaks with the past in the global political economy. The authors provide an extensive discussion of the roles of international financial institutions in constructing the global political economy, exploring in particular detail policy responses to the financial crisis of 2008 - what we have described here as the crisis within which the Covid-19 crisis is unfolding. They then turn to advance a meticulous analysis of policy documents published by the IMF in 2020. Their findings suggest that moderate changes registered after the 2008 crash relating to discretionary fiscal stimuli and gradual fiscal consolidation have persisted through 2020, but that more emphasis has now been placed on fiscal stimulus, public investments and planning, and job creation. Though these findings are limited, they suggest that the latter may take pride of place in future policy documents.

Daniella da Silva Nogueira de Melo and Maria (Mary) Papageorgiou continue the theme of regionalism in their comparative discussion of the ways in which ASEAN, the EU, the AU and MERCOSUR have responded to the different challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. They situate their ambitious comparison in the literature on new regionalism and outline the major responses, delays, successes and failures of each of these very different regional organisations. Though none, they argue, have been exemplary in their responses (though an exemplary response might be difficult to imagine if we consider the best response to be prevention), they

note more promising records in terms of action based on solidarity for ASEAN and the AU. More broadly, their article points to the continued central role of the state, or even a "return of the state" where crisis management is concerned. Regional organisations continue to appear ill-equipped to develop their actorness in such circumstances to push for more truly global governance.

June Park analyses empirically how a wide range of countries have coped with problems and controversies related to the conditional and temporary collection of data for contrasting the spread of the pandemic. The article attempts at examining the institutional variance in digital tool deployment to contact trace Covid-19 across six different democratic systems: South Korea, Europe (Germany, France, Italy and the UK post-Brexit) and the U.S. It describes in depth countries' strategies in embracing the digital economy of the future driven by artificial intelligence (AI) as the contactless economy becomes the norm. Europe and the U.S. have refrained from a centralized contact tracing method that involves GPS data collection and used a minimalist approach utilizing apps based on Google and Apple's Application Programming Interface (API) enabled by Bluetooth technology downloadable on a voluntary basis by citizens in order to abide by GDPR, failing to flatten the curve during the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, South Korea's maximalist approach of digital tracing utilizing big data analysis on the centralized Covid-19 Smart Management System platform and apps on self-diagnosis and self-quarantine under the IDCPA led the country to flatten the curve at an early stage. In addressing the gaps among varied approaches, this article analyzes the legal foundations and policy rationale for conditional and temporary data collection and processing across jurisdictions, opening ethical and political questions that are foundational for the political development of democratic states that emerge from growing tensions among the provision of health infrastructure, security and prevention, and individual privacy rights.

Along with Donald Trump, Bolsonaro is the president who has most "politicized" the Covid-19 crisis, fostering clear social and political polarization, neglecting the seriousness of the emergency, and even blaming regional and local authorities for taking political advantage of the situation and causing unemployment with the confinement measures they adopted. As a result, Brazil has emerged as one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic. Why has such absurdly poor management of the health crisis not further worsened – at least in appearance – Bolsonaro's approval ratings? The answer is provided by Aline Burni and Eduardo Tamaki's article, "Populist Communication During the Covid-19 Pandemic: the Case of Brazil's President Bolsonaro". The Authors argue that, paradoxically, "the pandemic represented an opportunity for populists like Bolsonaro to mobilise support, keep their popularity and political strength relatively stable, despite their crisis mismanagement" (Burni and Tamaki, infra). Bolsonaro's skill has lain on one hand in the reaffirmation of the rhetoric of division between "the people" and "dangerous elites" (political, international, health authorities, scientists) – propagating his closeness to the common man – and on the other hand in claiming all credit for a (not decisive) financial aid program, targeting the poorer population, despite the role played by the parliament in its implementation.

The next article in the Special Issue also focuses on personalities in politics, shifting our attention into a comparative perspective and to Europe, where questions of the personalisation of politics have long been discussed and sometimes linked to trends towards "presidentialization". This is the core question taken up by Rafaella Fittipaldi - is there evidence of trends, or continuing moves towards, presidentialization in Italy and Spain during the Covid-19 pandemic? The answer, she argues, is yes - albeit to different degrees. Situating her discussion in the literature on the personalisation of politics, Fittipaldi provides a compelling view of these trends over time, in Italy since the first Berlusconi government of the early 1990s, while in Spain the story is more recent. In both countries the governance of the pandemic saw moves to more presidential, executive law-making through emergency mechanisms. In both countries, trends towards the personalisation of politics were

clear, but not unidirectional: personalisation concerned both national leaders taking centralised executive decisions and appealing directly to populations through press conferences and social media; but also subnational leaders in regions. While in Italy this trend seems to weaken ties between the leader and political parties, this tie remains stronger in Spain.

Trust between citizens and governments is under discussion in the next article by Marija Sniečkutė and Inga Gaižauskaitė. As we have explored quite extensively earlier in this editorial, fundamental relationships and assumptions about the trust between governed and government are at stake in the pandemic, which has highlighted and arguably exacerbated ongoing erosion. This theme is taken up in this article by diverging from the widespread technique of drawing on public opinion surveys to determine levels of trust as a single variable to focus instead on the construction of trust in the discourses of Prime Ministers in Hungary, Lithuania and the Netherlands. This constructivist approach places emphasis on attempts to define trust for different ends: to convince populations that they should comply with measures to contain the pandemic, and to remind them that they are a unitary whole defined in opposition to groups of others. The inherent tension between these ends is discussed in depth in their work, which uses a discourse analysis approach to reveal a multifaceted construction of trust that moves beyond the more common unitary description. While Prime Ministers are found to resort to constructions of trust quite rarely in their pandemic speeches, when they do they are preoccupied with pleading for compliance, and Othering different groups within their countries that are seen as a threat, whether this is tied to compliance with rules to contain the pandemic or because of more nefarious political agendas.

In their article, Andrea Pedrazzani, Marco Maraffi, Simona Guglielmi, Ferruccio Biolcati, Antonio M. Chiesi, Giulia M. Dotti Sani, Riccardo Ladini, Francesco Molteni, Paolo Segatti, and Cristiano Vezzoni focus on the degree to which Italian citizens perceive democratic institutions as effective in coping with crises like the Covid-19 emergency by exploring the link between the personal threat from the virus and democratic support. The authors investigate how or to what extent the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic challenged citizens' opinions about the effectiveness of democracy, focusing on the Italian case. The analysis reveals the individual and contextual factors that influenced negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy (i.e. knowing someone who had died or was hospitalised due to Covid-19). Their conclusion is that negative opinions about democratic effectiveness in critical circumstances are triggered by short-term perceived threats, while long-term socio-political dispositions have an important moderating effect. As a result, the article suggests that political culture still plays a relevant role in any appraisal of the democratic process and, at least in the Italian context, political partisanship continues to be a significant and enduring factor in shaping public opinion.

Linda Basile, Marco Cilento and Nicolò Conti explore how the coronavirus crisis may affect the relationship between Italian public opinion and the EU, asking themselves if the coronavirus crisis could be catalyst for EU legitimacy. Italy, an historically pro-integration country, is nowadays characterized by a growing Euro-skepticism. An apparent paradox here is that while Italians decreasingly feel that their country benefits from the EU, they still want to increase EU cooperation in areas such as immigration and security. The hypothesis is that the pandemic may be an opportunity for the EU to increase its legitimacy in Italian public opinion, representing an opportunity for the EU to promote itself as chief manager of the response to crises and producing public demand for EU intervention. The analysis of EU attitudes among Italian public opinion in the context of the pandemic leads to the conclusion that Euroscepticism is a conditional posture in Italian society: public support for EU cooperation depends on instrumental calculation and finds a particularly favourable moment during the coronavirus pandemic.

In the article that follows, Fabrizio Di Mascio, Michele Barbieri, Alessandro Natalini, and Donatella Selva, focus on disinformation as a threat to liberal democracies in times of crisis, and they investigate the impact of

the Covid-19 crisis on the regulation of social media platforms. The Covid-19 crisis has catalyzed the shift to co-regulatory approaches that imposed reporting obligations on platforms at the European level, raising concerns about the implementation of the new European regulatory package that will largely depend on the initiative of individual Member States. The authors analyze the policy responses that have been enacted in Italy, a country with a traditionally low level of resilience to disinformation. They conclude that the Covid-19 crisis may contribute to affect the regulation of digital platforms and the response to disinformation within the new framework set forth by the Digital Services Act package along three dimensions: patterns of governance, normative goods of democracy at stake, and regulatory solutions adopted.

Shifting the analysis to the Greek case ("Covid-19 in Greece: from the Government's Clash with the Greek Church to the Diffusion of Anti-Mask Supporters"), George Kordas analyses the anomalous and terrible overlap of three crises. First, the economic crash, which reached one of its European pinnacles in Greece and "was combined after 2014 with a refugee and migration crisis, boosting anti-systemic rhetoric across Greek society" (infra) second. Third, the pandemic, which – together with the other two crises – has succeeded in emphasizing the absence of a secular State in Greece and the attractiveness of conspiracy theories in Greek society. In such a context, two political players gained a lot of space: the Orthodox Church and the anti-mask movement. The former positioned itself as the defender of religion, the latter as the protector of the Greek nation: both defend their interests and take advantage of the depth of penetration of the pandemic crisis into the political spectrum and the consequent reduced power of Greek political parties. By investigating the evolution of the Orthodox Church's official positions and the anti-Masks' conspiratorial lucubrations, the Author attempts to answer how the anti-systemic rhetoric of Greek society has been transformed during the Covid-19 crisis.

The article Lockdown and Breakdown in Italians' Reactions on Twitter during the First Phase of Covid-19, by Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Francesca Greco and Gevisa La Rocca, focuses on Italians' reactions to the pandemic on Twitter during the first phase of the 2020 lockdown. The authors look at the coronavirus hashtag, adopting the socio-constructivist approach of Emotional Text Mining. The aim is to identify within these tweets the actors, topics, and tone of the debate about the pandemic in an open public space, and to analyze the Italians' perception of the lockdown: are they in favor of it because of the defense of public health, or do they see it as a restriction of their individual freedom? The analysis of the content posted using the hashtag #coronavirus allows the authors to trace the evolution of Italian reactions and the meanings attributed to the state of pandemic. The analysis reveals two explanatory dimensions in the governance of the crisis: lockdown - an external consequence that is imposed as a defense system against contagion - and breakdown - an internal consequence that emerges as a secondary effect of the lockdown.

Another aspect of the health crisis relates to the "discrepancy between the needs expressed by the community and the solutions adopted to satisfy them" (Sampugnaro and Santoro, infra). Covid-19 was an accelerator of endemic negative factors, in the sense of political fragmentation, reduced economic resources, and new forms of poverty. Rossana Sampugnaro and Patrizia Santoro's essay ("The Pandemic Crisis, Italian Municipalities, and Community Resilience") aims to understand local institutions' resilience, i.e. their ability to deal with the emergence and even use it to make the institutions themselves sustainable. As a consequence, the pandemic has been an indicator of the municipal "interventionism" of Mayors, who propose themselves as community builders. On the one hand, new relationships between the public and private sectors emerge from the response to the health crisis in the context of local welfare, with the promise "that these changes may become lasting, even after the pandemic event ends" (ivi). On the other hand, we – the Editors – wonder how easy it will be to distinguish between the forms of resilience needed to recover from a shock and the intrusiveness of private

profit gaining a footing in the new stock of information, knowledge and regulations, which will likely continue in organizational and institutional settings in the near future.

Fabio Introini, Niccolò Morelli, and Cristina Pasqualini analyze how Social Streets promoted sociality and mutual help among neighbours in time of lockdown, and how Streeters, defined as people who are at least members of the Facebook group of their Social Street, have profited from the possibility to have at their disposal an online social place where they can interact and be informed about the possibility of giving and receiving help. They state that, during lockdown, Social Streets proved their resilience and helped the resilience of the overall neighbourhood. Acting as a plastic connective rather than a (more traditional kind of) collective which can support and empower its members when conditions require, Social Streets played a pivotal role during lockdown. They kept neighbours informed about what was going on in the neighbourhood, sustained and produced convivial ties, and organised mutual help services. In the hard times of lockdown, when most of habits and everyday practices were suspended, Social Streets proved very important in setting a cognitive, emotional, and organizational framework inside which conviviality and collaboration among neighbours could find greater plausibility.

Between lockdowns and re-openings, the best response to the pandemic remains an open question. But the best for whom? Leiza Brumat and Victoria Finn ("Mobility and Citizenship during Pandemics: The Multilevel Political Responses in South America") analyze the point of view of migrants in Latin America, i.e. the continent where the regime for human mobility was characterized "by free residence, equal rights, the enunciation of the 'right to migrate', and non-criminalization of migration" (Brumat and Finn, infra). The dialectic between the aforementioned "rights-based" mobility and the high number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Latin America has caused social and normative contradictions: restrictions on international border crossings and internal movements are combined with access to new rights, as well as economic subsidies, at least in some countries. Through the pandemic, new hierarchies are formed even among those forced to give up their roots: non-resident nationals, short- or long-term foreign residents and undocumented migrants shape social stratification via external mobility. "Regarding internal mobility, barriers came from both national and local governments to prevent movement except for essential workers, regardless of nationality status or sometimes residence" (ivi). In both cases, the challenge evoked by the pandemic is likely to have lasting, informal, but substantial effects.

The war against the Coronavirus is bound to produce victims on several levels, with consequences that will last, even after the defeat of Covid-19. The pandemic has triggered a second crisis in Greece, following on from the migration refugee crisis of 2015. Two crises also means two paths of securitization, both of Covid-19 and of immigration. Georgia Dimari investigates these through a discourse analysis of 72 items such as Messages of the Greek Prime Minister and cabinet, the scientific community and legal texts. "The Emergence of a New Security Apparatus in Greece: The Securitization of the Migration/Refugee-Covid-19 Crises Nexus" explains how the "double crisis" has produced policies led by major security concerns and "articulated by political elite actors and mega-actors such as scientists" (Dimari, infra). In the Greek case, both politicians and the scientific community have shaped a "quadruple securitization" and a new security "apparatus" within the interplay between the refugee/migration crisis and the pandemic. As a result – inevitably fostered by Greek public opinion's dissatisfaction with persistent lockdowns and restrictions to movement – "there is raised the question of how to do security policy taking into consideration that there is indeed a 'boiling point' of peoples' acceptance of rights deprivation" (ivi). Persistent allusions to 'war', 'evil', 'enemy' and other conflict-based metaphors reinforces the discursive association between 'migrant' and 'threat', through the bridge of Covid-19.

While in the past they had been invisible, neglected, and forgotten, migrants working in the Italian agricultural sector suddenly became "essential workers" during the Covid-19 crisis and "deserved" the legislator's attention. Thus, Asia Della Rosa examines the Italian context before, during and after the application of the amnesty, which planned the regularization of a limited number of migrants working in the agricultural sector. Was the recognition of migrants' rights and dignity to be forthcoming at last? No, not entirely. In her "Amnesty for whom? How the invisibles became essentials", the Author argues "that the regularization put into practice by the Italian government must be critically challenged, both in the premises and in the effects produced" (Della Rosa, infra). The amnesty is only useful to fill the labour shortage in the agricultural sector and has been strongly criticized, first and foremost by the sans papiers themselves: "thousands of people made invisible, who have raised their voices in protest, and the civil society, and hundreds of associations, cooperatives, social spaces, which voluntarily contributed to help the migrant workers to apply to the sanatoria, even if they consider it a fictitious regularization" (ivi). To sum up, the pandemic has helped to highlight the already precarious living conditions of "irregular" agricultural workers in Italy; at the same time, the health and labour crisis have even exacerbated their difficulties. The sanatoria is not enough, as it is not able to eliminate the high degree of precariousness in migrants' lives.

A radical change is still a long way off.

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