Mapping Academic Debates on Methods, Ethics and Theorising during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Knowledge Productions in Uncertain Times

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Introductory reflections

'Seeing, or the inability to see something, is political. In a world which has tried to make all things visible, the natural history of viruses has been a history of visualisation fuelled primarily by fear' writes Sria Chatterjee (2020), zooming into current pandemic times where the coronavirus' visibility 'has been both panacea and political tool – depending on who does it – and the processes of visualisation are implicated in forms of care as much as they are in political violence, surveillance, xenophobia and institutional racism' (ibid.). One key aim of research is to produce knowledge and claims about what is unknown, unheard, invisible, about what needs (re)consideration and a particular kind of understanding, problematising, modelling and presenting some kind of temporal certainty of insight (or "expertise"). Research knowledge is not only about "seeing", but also about scale. However, most life in our endangered planet remains invisible to humankind (despite all technological advances and auxiliary tools) in its quest of 'domination of all natural phenomena and native people', argues Chatterjee (2020).

So, what do you see or think that you see when producing knowledge, when engaging in research practices in pandemic times? Where do you

look, how, why, with whom or shall we say for whom? Does this "seeing" allow you to deal with the pandemic-induced uncertainty and anxiety that so many experience(d) since early 2020? What does it mean for future scholarly quests in terms of epistemic, methodological and ethical practices? What are your snapshots of these pandemic times; how do they inform of where you are heading next as a scholar? What pandemic grid, patterns and manifestations lay in front of your inner eye and cognitive landscape? What lenses do you employ? What are distortions or blind spots? Where don't you dare to look and why, or from what have you stepped away or stepped into without hesitating for a blink of the eye?

Soon after the WHO declared the diseases related to COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020, many speculations about the effects and consequences started to emerge. These presumptions were made under conditions of uncertainty because little data was available, experiences to draw from hardly existed and conditions were rapidly changing. Due to the novelty of the pandemic, a main difficulty has been and might be for the foreseeable future to discern in how far the issues and phenomena that we write about are going to remain significant in the future or whether some issues that appear monumental today might turn out irrelevant tomorrow, or despite their continued relevance, certain issues might be overshadowed by seemingly more urgent questions. As the questions above illustrate, we were confronted with a plethora of old and new dilemmas and in order to address them, we started to read the work of other scholars and we initiated the working group 'Researching in Times of a Pandemic.' The work group become a forum to discuss our thoughts and concerns, to exchange ideas and think about how to go on (see Batool et al. this issue for more details). We started to read widely on topic and participated in a number of academic events and webinars. We noticed that the majority of readings and projections came from and were intended for Global North contexts. Based on the readings and our conversations we mapped topics, questions and blind spots and eventually decided to document and discuss the themes and patterns that emerged from our engagement with the topic in a more systematic manner.

The present critical literature review is the outcome of this exercise. In this review, we included academic journal articles, academic blog posts, reports and working papers from think tanks, research institutes etc. along with academic webinars and podcasts that were published or that took place between March 2020 and August 2021. We focused primarily on (inter-)disciplinary contributions from the humanities, social sciences and global/public health research related to the pandemic

and excluded publications that exclusively focused on medicine and virology.[1]ant We thus attempt to document academic conversations and discussions that emerged during the first year of the pandemic in a very exemplary manner without the claim to be exhaustive and comprehensive. A further caveat needs consideration: the duration of standard peer review processes implies that many important contributions are about to enter academic discussions from 2022 onwards only and are thus beyond the scope of our mapping here. Included are in particular academic blog posts, editorials/editors' notes, research notes or review articles from academic journals, academic institutions along with scientific societies/associations because they are published faster than lengthy reports or research articles.

Furthermore, such publications are a medium for the quick dissemination of ideas and thoughts that allow for engagement and widespread reception, to kick start debates. We made an effort to find publications focused on Global South contexts, engaging with multiple and divergent positionalities for knowledge production as well as (inter-)disciplinary perspectives across the humanities and social sciences, but not only. Many of the issues and questions related to research and knowledge productions during the pandemic are not entirely new but have existed in some form or the other. Hence, we also included publications from scholars situated in peace and conflict studies, gender studies, human geography, philosophy, critical legal studies, global and public health plus infectious diseases to learn and benefit from their deliberations, based on more consolidated experiences supported by evidence collected over a longer time period.

Multiple "hangovers"?!: theorising and conceptualising research in pandemic times (Andrea Fleschenberg)

Right from the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic becoming a global, yet multi-faceted, divergent challenge for governments and communities alike, public intellectuals, scholar(-activist)s and those involved in academic theorizing spoke out in a quest to produce cognitive guidance in times marked by experiences of overload, dissonance, bias and profound uncertainty. Some re-uttered key theoretical conceptualisations in relation to how to perceive the novel pandemic and its implications (Agamben 2020b; Mbembe 2020; Sotiris 2020; see critique by Benvenuto 2020; Boaventura Sousa Santos 2020); some re-visited and challenged prominent theorising in a call for a novel theoretical vocabulary and practice (Das 2020; Saeed 2020). Part of a larger epistemic-cum-methodological struggle of scientific knowledge

production, a number of scholars/thinkers used the opportunity to rattle the taken-for-granted boxes and foundations to unsettle and decentre mainstream thinking and knowledge production, bringing to the fore theoretical approaches and conceptual concerns devised, understood to speak to the pandemic situation with a significant explicatory potential (Kothari et al. 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). Others re-sold old wine in new bottles, tempted by the pandemic-induced frenzy for cognitive guidance and certainty when mapping concepts, research fields and phenomena at an early stage which appeared like a look into the crystal ball, academic guessing of sorts in a world unhinged. Some thus firmly cautioned against jumping on the bandwagon of the crisis at the expense of the well-being of respondents and at the expense of diverting attention from other vital topics (Dhungana 2020; Kirmani 2020; Kazemi & Muzhary 2020).

And quite a number of voices would argue that the experience of compounded dissonance, uncertainty and anxiety understood to shape the 'COVID exception' amounts to nothing more or less than the bubble of the privileged Global North bursting; a momentum (or 'strong question', Saeed 2020) which the usual prominent theorists have little experience with or a distorted radar of (Appadurai 2020). Challenging prominent intellectuals and theorists like Agamben and Žižek, Boaventura Sousa Santos (2020) opines: '[t]hey write about the world, but not with the world', noting that '[i]t is as if the pandemic's clarity generated so much transparency that we found ourselves incapable of reading, let alone rewriting what we wrote'. The debate surrounding Agamben's essay on the COVID-19 pandemic is exemplary in point, but beyond the scope of this writing (see Agamben 2020a & b; Benvenuto 2020; Sotiris 2020a & b).

How much and in what ways the building blocks and moving parts of academic theorizing have fissured, cracked up or became even unhinged due to a kind of potential tectonic pandemic shift, remains to be seen. Quite a number of voices would remind us that dissonance is the "eternal normal" in academia and suggest putting pandemic anxieties for cognitive guidance and certainty into perspective (see for example Law 2004). After all, as Butler (2020) remarks, science is an

> active process of sorting information and revisiting theories accordingly. It is a dynamic process. It's not the ultimate authority that has all answers at once. It cannot furnish the ethical and political guidelines for how to live in common. […] Perhaps we should be glad that scientists disagree and that they ask each other for proof, that they come up with new conceptual paradigms. (Butler 2020)

Besides, we need to carefully contextualise a dynamic and divergent pandemic context as COVID-19 does not play out on a plain canvass. It rather intersects with an era of rising widespread right-wing populisms thriving upon conspiracy theories, continuously throwing out fake news/

science claims. What emerges are multi-faceted challenges to scientific literacy (or proficiency) and a widespread counteracting ignorance of science in pandemic times (e.g. when it comes to vaccines or pandemic protocols). Worldwide, authoritarian right-wing populisms successfully employ a denigrating critique of political and functional elites (and technocrats), labelled as peoples-averse establishment, to mobilise and organise grass-roots political support as well as to unsettle and/or redefine existing normative orders, political institutions and processes. Pandemic times have been an important political playing field as not only the number of demonstrations and protest movements against governance measures indicate (see Douglas 2021 on COVID-19 related conspiracy theories). Thus, Butler's warning needs to be read in various directionalities:

> It is always worrisome when there is an expert class telling us what is true and what is not and we are supposed to receive that knowledge and not question it and they act as if they are the new leaders. They are not elected, so it is not exactly a democratic situation. It can be very paternalistic. (Butler 2020)

Those assuming the mantle of scientific knowledge production have a responsibility and an important role to play. For the general public as well as diverse practitioners to be able to make informed readings and decisions about models presented, scientific claims made and evidences laid out, academic scholars are key interlocutors. 'Science writers' need to be conscious and careful about their language and linguistic-cum-conceptual translation practices, entangled with profound (research) ethical questions on how we engage with various audiences in complex, volatile settings in our knowledge productions, disseminations and communications (Butler 2020; see further Aula 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020).

Many call to utilise the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions as a transformative window of opportunity to how we approach (neo-)colonial inequalities—be it in terms of knowledge productions and scientific practices, be it in terms of responses to public health not only during emergencies and exacerbated pandemic fallouts (see Oti et al. 2021; Büyum et al. 2020; Pailey 2020; Mitlin et al. 2020; Mwambari et al. 2021; Pruulman-Vengerfeldt 2020; WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as quoted in The Lancet Global Health 2020).

One key proponent of a decolonial decentring of knowledge productions and discourses is Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 366) who 'propose[s] decolonial love as the soul of the post-COVID-19 world order based on a new ethics for living together, economies of care, a politics of conviviality, and hospitality as opposed to enmity.' '[A]cross the Global North-Global South power spectrum' the current pandemic, yet again, raises important questions 'about the geopolitics of knowledge (which historical archive do we run to, who should learn from whom, and which epistemology is privileged?)' and requires a 'new vocabulary' for a world 'turned upside down', adequate to this 'civilisational crisis', argues Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 366-8). Critiquing a prevalent pandemic myopia, he highlights the multi-faceted dimensions of concern—existential, epistemic and ecological—which require a decolonial reading, focused on power and a critique of Eurocentric knowledge systems, and a stronger reliance on Global South knowledges, understood to be 'largely experiential and experimental knowledges' (ibid.: 372). Taking cue from decolonial thinkers Vazqez and Sousa Santos, the COVID-19 pandemic 'has signalled the dawn of de-Westernization' and thus opened 'the possibilities of shifting the geopolitics of power and knowledge in a decolonial manner' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020: 369).

378

> A poignant point is emerging which is that the knowledge that carried us over the past 500 years and has plunged us into the current civilizational crisis cannot be the same knowledges that is used to take us out of the present crisis and into the future. The way COVID-19, […], successfully took the world by surprise might be a sign of epistemic crisis – a crisis of knowledge which is no longer able to predict challenges and problems, as they come and let alone being able to successfully protect people. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020: 370)

Inviting us to think at the interstices of paradox, crisis and crossroads for cognitive guidance in pandemic times, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 374-8) prompts us to 'rethink' and 'unthink' existing understandings and readings of what it means and entails to be a human being, apart from crisis, modernity (and its epistemic premises), along with 'racial capitalism's operative logics of creating geographies of wealth and geographies of scarcity' (ibid.: 376). Taking cue from Agamben's notion of 'bare life', Fanon, Sousa Santos, Rutazibwa along with Escobar's and Mignolo's call for pluriversality, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a magnifying glass for the 'global coloniality' in place, 'amplify[ing] the resurgent and insurgent demands for de-colonization' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020: 381). Such a decolonial turn thus requires deimperalisation, de-westernisation, de-patriarchisation, deracialisation, debourgeoisement, decorporisation,

democratisation, decanonisation, deborderisation along with desecul-arisation (ibid.: 382f.). In line with a decolonial call in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as 'one of the most disruptive pandemics' in terms of fault lines on multiple axes exposed, or the scale of those affected, Sari Hanafi further argues that we need to supplement the current post-colonial approach with an anti-authoritarian one to use the pandemic as a trigger for transformation. He also argues for us to rethink key frames and conceptual notions when imagining and acting within (post-) pandemic new realities, as COVID-19 is a 'disease, not only of globalization, but of Anthropocene.'[2]

If we attempt to adhere to this call in our academic knowledge productions and research practices, this means to accept and confront cognitive dissonance as part of a larger, long-term enterprise, as we have to fundamentally challenge, un- and re-think epistemological, methodological and research ethical premises, vocabularies, tools and practices in place. This un- and re-thinking would put decentred, participatory, non-extractive, sustainability-oriented knowledge productions, decolonial and feminist notions of care and interconnectedness at the forefront of our research practices in a post-pandemic world, moving from dissonance, silences and emergencies to pluriversal 'conviviality', or in the words of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 384), 'decolonial love'.

Writing from such a decolonial epistemic perspective on pandemic outbreaks and concerns therewith, Richardson (2020) reminds us about the limits of theoretical modelling and forecasting of pandemic trends, on which many of our readings, positions and responses hinge on in times of lived uncertainty and anxiety. Modelling relies on presumptions which are not neutral, but ideologically infused, centred in terms of classed or racialised perspectives. The 2013-16 Ebola outbreak is a reference point for many (global) public health researchers that is based in a contested field of inquiry and knowledge politics as recent debates on vaccine nationalism indicate. Richardson (2020) argues in light of studies conducted during this Ebola outbreak that

> Mathematical models of infectious disease transmission are merely fables dressed informal language (that therefore create the illusion of being scientific). For the most part, such models serve not as forecasts, but rather as a means for setting epistemic confines that sustain predatory accumulation rather than challenge it. Pandemicity–which we might conceive of as the linking of humanity through contagion–may bring about the dawning of a relational consciousness in the descendants of colonialists, especially in the Global North. (Richardson 2020; see also Das 2020; Teti, Schatz & Liebenberg 2020)

Arguing for a decolonisation of knowledge productions, research practices and ethics, key objectives for public health science, but not only, are thus an orientation towards a relational consciousness and understanding of 'human interconnectedness', coupled with redistributive solidarity while acknowledging 'pathologies of power', i.e., 'the Global North's complicity in producing planetary health inequities' (Richardson 2020). Consequently, certain knowledges and evidences put forward during pandemic outbreaks are problematic claims that disguise root causes, trajectories and ramifications, even furthering necropolitical tendencies (borrowing from Mbembe 2003). Examples are the treatment of migrant workers in Singapore, the scapegoating of East Asian communities worldwide apart from public responses to African decision making or the disregard for Global South responses and knowledge productions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We would like to further exemplify the current discussion of reconceptualising or challenging of epistemic approaches, theoretical concepts and theoretical fragments through some spotlights, namely on the notions of "necropolitics", "risk" and "resilience."

'Resilience appears to be the key policy buzzword of our times,' argues David Chandler (2020) while explicating how this conceptual notion is revisited, reframed and challenged in pandemic times. Being resilient was a positively connoted term in pre-pandemic times when confronting threats and risks, understood in academic and policy discourses as a desirable community-oriented, bottom-up approach. Linking his reading of the pandemic with Agamben's notion of 'bare life', Chandler argues that this connotation was inverted in 'expert readings' of how to 'tame' this pandemic with its main reading of 'emergency' and 'uncertain risks' and potential fallouts. A public's resilience became considered as 'dangerous' and susceptible to increased vulnerability, challenging community's autonomy and reason and 'trust' in itself as well as vis-à-vis those expert stakeholders and knowledge makers in charge. 'The Coronavirus brings to the surface the limits of discourses of resilience', along with questions of whose security we are concerned with, who can be trusted to ensure our own security and safety—and, ultimately, what we consider humans to be capable of. If this is a wakeup call for new approaches and paradigms, we need to thoroughly scrutinise how we respond to the pandemic-accelerated idea that 'the "human" […] is seen as a hubristic and problematic fiction' (Chandler 2020).[3]

While this is a prominent reading in Global North-centred theorising and conceptualising of pandemic times, Appadurai (2021) suggests us to read against the grain of such 'expert readings' (Chandler 2020) in

his critique of Western academic thinkers such as Agamben, Butler or Žižek (and one would add here all those employing Foucault's theoretical fragments of biopower and biopolitics). '[S]ince the exception is not the occasion for the seizing of special powers by the sovereign, but the concession of that all national sovereigns are weak', Appadurai invites us 'to observe, nurture and mobilise this new moment of possibility for society, in contrast to the state, as the only reliable site for a politics of survival' in his decentred theoretical reading of the current 'state of exception' and its entangled rediscovery of the social and social resources (Appadurai 2020).

Borrowing from Mbembe's seminal work on necropolitics (Mbembe 2003; see also Mbembe 2020), Scott Schaffar (2021) revisits the notion of 'essentialness' [in other pandemic parlance termed as 'systemic relevance or importance'] in light of Mbembe's conceptualisation of necro-ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. While not a new concept in Mbembe's theorizing, the pandemic conjured new racialised inequalities through a 'societal triage', based on a particular algorithm which reverses the very notion of medical triage in terms of directionality and allocation of resources. Ordering pandemic societal set-ups by necroethical logics of who needs to be protected and who is deemed "expandable" and thus can be "exposed" to the pandemic virus while saving others, is put into conversation not only with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Pointing towards wider-spanning, intersecting racialised, gendered and classed pandemic governance responses, Scott (2021) highlights the social disappearance of 'sub-marginalised' and 'sub-alternised' groups, such as front-line workers in a variety of work sectors. Consequently, pandemic governance programmes / packages spotlighted certain societal groups and stakeholders' needs and 'risks' at the expense, obfuscation or obliteration of others (re)marginalised. Lockdown measures or vaccination drives impact(ed) differently the socio-economic fabric, leading to othering practices, subsequent exclusions, disassociations and (post)colonial necropolitics within the Global North, which continued societal ordering logics, perpetuating or reconfiguring inequalities, invisibilities and absent representations.

Taking cue from John Cox's lens of 'surplus' as conceptual frame, Scott argues that the pandemic presents its own necropolitics in a Mbembian sense, exposing certain groups to protect those human or material or infrastructural resources deemed valuable at the expense of their own life and health under the label of "heroes" or "essential". Or, in other words, classifying some as to be sacrificed for protecting others

as a necroethical practice to negotiate pandemic risk exposure levels and perpetuating (or re-configuring) inequalities and othering practices, is a necro-ethical act enshrined in pre-existing gendered, racialised, classed socio-political, economic, cultural and juridical orders governing pandemic responses, be it vertically from state actors and non-state actors such as companies or be it horizontally by ordinary citizens encountering pandemic anxiety and uncertainty. The pandemic and its trajectories have many dimensions and facets across various arenas, ranging from the biological, ecological, economic, political, and social to the epistemological. In times of a human-centred planetary crisis not everyone is exposed in the same way, is experiencing the same risks as well as mitigation options.

Writing in the interdisciplinary blog Corona Times, coordinated with an international affiliated network by the University of Cape Town, Elisio Macamo (2020) critiques a Eurocentric approach to COVID-19 govern-mentalities as well as an interlinked, provincialised (or localised) notions of "risk" and "normality". Risk as well as subsequent expertise or know-ledge readings put forward to understand, respond to are more contro-versial than proposed measures suggest, given different, context-specific vulnerabilities, hazards and thus fallouts. 'We face the same enemy, but not the same risk', highlights Macamo (2020), reminding us of the (neo-)colonial dimension of pandemic imaginations, discourses and responses (as well as resources thereof, be it in terms of social infrastructure and its colonial legacies, be it in terms of colonial approaches to whose knowledge counts, is valued or disregarded). What is considered by a privileged segment of humanity, positioned in the Global North, as an exceptional crisis in need of emergency measures, might just be considered as the everyday normal for a marginalised majority, positioned in the Global South, where 'confronting crises was all that life was about' (Macamo 2020, see also: Pailey 2020). What constitutes then an adequate pandemic response, as troublesome and ethically messy this might be, might take different costs, trade-offs and concerns into account. What do "we" see in the pandemic mirror and who sees what when "we" ask about the pandemic "crisis" or the post-pandemic "normal" are therefore key questions for us to carefully ponder upon, from a decentred, intersectional vantage point.

Mapping research agendas and avenues (Sarah Holz)

The pandemic, with the concomitant lockdowns, travel bans, distancing and hygiene regulations has not only raised questions about how we conduct research. A number of researchers have taken the opportunity

to map topics and issues that require special attention on the research agendas of individual scholars, universities and funding agencies. The pandemic presents an opportunity to re-emphasise the need to engage with certain topics, research methods and funding decisions. More broadly, the overall conduct of research and the attached career and funding structures have come back into focus.

While mapping research agenda items, several scholars cautioned against reacting in panic out of fear that research is delayed or that the collected data suddenly appears irrelevant (Bond et al. 2020; Gummer et al. 2020; Hussain 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020). They highlight that unexpected events such as natural catastrophes or political instabilities and conflicts, can always happen and thus lead to subsequent project adaptations. Even under less dramatic circumstances, flexibility and improvisation are part and parcel of research projects (Dhungana 2020). However, rapidly changing situations require skills for navigation, which might be a particular challenging issue for early career researchers (Christia & Lawson 2020; Nicholas 2020). These circumstances remind us that robust research questions, anchored in conceptual frameworks, can accommodate change and/or volatility without losing validity. Moreover, it is a call for context-sensitive, locally grounded slow science practices (see Hussain 2020; Mountz et al. 2015; Adams et al. 2014).

Most of the issues that have been flagged for research agendas and/or to aid policy preparedness as part of academic knowledge dissemination and communication can be categorised as: Medical and health responses, social effects, state and governance related aspects and the impact of the pandemic on research practices and researchers. We can further distinguish between agenda items that seek to make an immediate assessment of current needs and grievances juxtaposed against agenda items that seek to assess and take into consideration the long-term effects of the pandemic and interlinked implications across policy fields and pandemic dimensions.

Most of the proposed research agenda items are not novel, instead the authors of the literature under review stress that the pandemic has modified the extent, reach and intensity of these issue. Veena Das (2020) thus asks the pertinent question to what extend it is necessary to re-orient research practices, topics and data collection. Christia and Lawson (2020) point to a danger of 'crowding out,' i.e. side-lining, certain issues because they are, at least for the moment, not seen as research worthy or urgent matters. Similarly, Chung, Xu & Zhang (2020: 111) caution against focusing only on solutionism while avoiding to

address structural issues and conditions, i.e., only treating the symptoms without addressing the causes (see also: Madianou 2019). While there might be a rush to address all items at once, it remains to be seen which topics and approach will continue to attract attention, and funding. The following sections map prominent avenues of research that appeared in the reviewed literature.

During a pandemic, health and medical sciences, particularly epidemiology, appear as fields of study that require immediate attention. State bodies and donor agencies need demographic and health data (e.g. about infection rates, spread and severity of the diseases or treatment methods and vaccination rates that is cross-tabulated with demographic data) to assess needs and identify grievances. Based on this data policies are devised and responses can be prepared (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020).

Any crisis disproportionately affects marginalised and vulnerable groups (e.g. women, refugees or low-income groups). A shared concern was how the pandemic unevenly has and will affect specific segments of society, namely its adversarial effects for (re-)marginalised and vulnerable groups, particularly women, migrants, refugees and low-income groups (Anderlini 2020; Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Bond, Lake & Parkinson 2020; Irons & Gibbon 2021; Kirmani 2020; McPherson 2020; Purkayastha 2020; Rao 2021; Team & Manderson 2020). In this context, persons with different abilities, the elderly, young adults and children received comparatively fewer mentions in the literature and point to a research desideratum as well as a frequent blind spot in public discourses. For many scholars, the pandemic constitutes an added layer of difficulty, a crisis within an already existing crisis (Kazemi & Muzhary 2020; Irons & Gibbon 2021; Kirmani 2020). Those who are affected also includes persons and groups who might not generally be considered as marginalised or vulnerable, for instance care providers, single parents, high-risk groups, children or the elderly.

The pandemic has brought to the forefront that good quality and reliable disaggregated data that can adequately depict the complexities of society, particularly the differential impact of the pandemic on different sections of society, often does not exist. Many standardised social and medical surveys or questionnaires do not adequately capture the diverse needs of all sections of society. Moreover, the needs and grievances of marginalised groups are not well documented because they are often harder to reach and they are thus hardly represented in surveys and data sets (Alio et al. 2020; Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Lozet & Easton-Calabria 2020; McPherson 2020). They highlight

that it is necessary to go beyond models and design data collection tools that can capture the lived experiences of the pandemic in a more nuanced way (Teti, Schatz & Liebenberg 2020). The push for big data at all costs also raises a number of ethical questions to avoid extractivism, data colonialism and function creep (Madianou 2019; Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020). These deliberations invite us to rethink existing and/or frequently employed operationalisations of certain empirical entities in research and subsequent sample techniques. Cognisant of pre-existing and newly emerging interlocking systems of oppressions, we need to carefully decentre and critically scrutinise who is excluded and who is included, who is speaking and who is silenced—locally, nationally and globally; in our research endeavours as well as in public discussions (Chowdhry, Ross & Swallow 2020; Morrow et al. 2015; Irons & Gibbon 2021).

Another set of items on the research agenda relates to inter-personal and social relations as well as social cohesion, in short, how the pandemic has altered how we live together. This includes changes in and modifications of individual and collective behaviour, inter-personal and inter-community relations.

The pandemic has reconfigured public and private spaces (Honey-Rosés et al. 2020; Kordshakeri & Fazeli 2020) and social relations. (2) In this context the home, as a site of private has emerged as a focal site of research (Góralska 2020). Chung, Xu & Zhang observe that a 'functional diversification of household space' (2020: 111) has taken place. The home is 'simultaneously portrayed as a private sanctuary from the deadly virus circulating in public spaces […] and an extension of the space of public regulation and responsibility' (ibid.). Work from home directives have affected work and team culture but also reinforced gender divisions because the main burden of unpaid labour and care work falls primarily on women and the financial independence of women (Anderlini 2020; Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020; Kirmani 2020; Primandari 2020; Rao 2021). Moreover, the increase of domestic violence shows that the home as a site of study is not only positively connoted, not everyone lives in a safe home, some do not even have a home at all which calls for context-sensitive and intersectional approaches (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020; Hasan 2020; Kirmani 2020; Primandari 2020; Ryan & El Ayadi 2020; Sanders et al. 2020).

Governance and service delivery as well as the reconfiguration of citizen-state relations is another set of research agenda items that was mentioned in the reviewed literature (Hartley & Jarvis 2020; Manderson & Levine 2020; Greer et al. 2020; Sotiris 2020a; Sotiris 2020b).[4]

Governments have to weigh decisions about the imposition of restrictions in the name of public health and safety against ideas of fundamental freedoms. In how far citizens accept or contest these decisions is related to institutional trust. How institutional trust is maintained and expanded is one line of inquiry to follow (Khan Mohmand 2020).

Such studies could help to devise answers to complex social questions such as why (or why not) people adhere to hygiene measures, or why (or why not) people follow recommendations to get vaccinated. The dissemination and reception of fake news (Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020), right-wing populist and esoteric protest movements and conspiracy theories (Ali 2020; Douglas 2021; Manderson & Levine 2020; Lasco 2020; Ortega & Orsini 2020) emerge as topics to watch in the context social cohesion. Similarly, the pandemic affects existing discourses on othering and scapegoating (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020; Irons & Gibbon 2021; Onoma 2020) particularly when looking at vulnerable groups and minorities who had already experienced discrimination before the onset of the pandemic. This issue might also be interwoven or (re-)inscribed into existing research phenomena which might alter in dynamic, scope, dimensions and scale (see Nizaruddin 2020 and Kalia this issue).

The state appears to (re-)emerge as a central actor in basic health service delivery, at the same time COVID-19 related state policies evoke high levels of distrust and resistance, an aspect that was discussed in the previous section. These dialectical yet opposing dynamics open up questions about individual and collective responsibilities as well as the role of the state in the well-being of the people who live within its territory. This begs the question: To what extend should studies 'bring the state back in' (Mitchell 1991)? At the same time, there is also a 'strong and growing focus on individuals and firms as sites and objects of governance' (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020: 113). In assessments of citizen-state relations, the differential experiences people have with the state apparatus, which includes present structural inequalities but also historical (post-) colonial experiences, are an important aspect to consider (Appadurai 2020; Appadurai et al. 2021, see also: Mbembe 2020; Mbembe 2021).

Big-data governance (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020) and digitisation are buzzwords that have gained currency since the onset of the pandemic and are linked to pre-existing debates on data colonialism and extractive research practices. Due to the pandemic states and companies collect large amounts of data about citizens and consumers. Such practices can aid service delivery and preparedness but they can also easily regress

to data surveillance. Often big-data governance is portrayed as a mere technical issue, when in fact is it also a political one, especially in states where weak privacy laws and data protection laws exist and that are prone to hacker attacks because there are not sufficient funds for data security plans (Mandianou 2019). The pandemic has also highlighted the need to reconsider extractive data collection practices and techno-colonialism, subjects that have been raised by various scholars for years but which are highlighted now. Madianou argues that 'datafication is integral to the reproduction of asymmetric power relationships' (2020: 2). Moreover, data collected is often not representative of those affected because (1) it is collected without the inclusion and feedback of the affected; and (2) with little time and room granted for reflecting on potential biases due to tight implementation schedules or inadequate planning (Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Mandianou 2019).

Another research agenda item is the effect of the pandemic on academic life in general. Weller (2020) notes that the pandemic has exposed that teaching, supervision practices and skill training have not been taken serious as valuable parts of academic job descriptions. As a result, many junior and senior scholars felt ill-prepared by the changed conditions. Training course and curricula development is thus another site that remains under construction (see also Christia & Lawson 2020; Irons & Gibbon 2021; Kara & Khoo 2020; Nicholas 2020).[5] Several authors have also focused on mental health and emotions at the intersection of requirements of perpetual productivity, theoretical distance and funding deadlines with loss, personal crisis isolation, precarity and affective labour (Selim 2021; Günel et al. 2020; Käihkö 2020). These issues are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The ethical compass: revisiting research ethics in pandemic times (Andrea Fleschenberg)

The mapping of research agenda items in the previous section shows that immediately, from the initial stage pandemic-related academic debates centred on concerns with inequalities, injustices and divides. Scholars from a variety of (inter-)disciplinary approaches called for a different praxis of research ethics thus knowledge productions, not only with regard to Global North and Global South interactions and asymmetries in knowledge productions, research collaborations and academic publishing.

Such calls spotlighted a number of challenges and concerns: (1) newly emerging or shifting ethical challenges due to pandemic settings

(Crivello & Favara 2020; Dawson et al. 2020; Garthwaite 2020); (2) the relationship between research assistants / 'facilitating researchers' and 'contracting researchers' or 'Northern "research capitalists" and 'Southern "research proletariat"' (Dunia et al.: 2020; see in particular Bisoka 2020); (3) navigating research via digital means, new technologies and spaces while mindful of communication, connectivity, resources and agency divides (Hensen et al. 2021; Kara & Khoo 2020; Monson 2020); (4) revisiting notions of care, reciprocity and relatedness for research ethics to counter extractive research practices and gazing (see Corbera et al. 2020; Shankar 2020); (5) questions of integrity and the need for (novel) research in pandemic times (Carayannis & Bolin 2020; Hensen et al. 2020; Garthwaite: 2020; Pacheco & Zaimağaoğlu: 2020).

In our understanding of research ethics, inspired from feminist, decolonial, indigenous approaches, ethical practice goes beyond a clearance-based approach in light of ethical review boards and the fitting of research projects into checklist-based, neat containers of academic research practice before "entering the field" (if this is ever possible, see Katz 1994). While research ethics is often messy and political, challenging and multi-dimensional, we consider it as an ongoing self-reflective endeavour and obligation, starting from the inception of the very idea for a particular research project, navigating 'the problem of gaze' (Abimbola 2019) and positionality to addressing concerns for reciprocity and dissemination. Such critical takes on research ethics, including a widely published, vocal call for feminist and decolonial notions of research ethics, spread early on in academic debates about research in pandemic times.

Calls for more inclusive, diversity-oriented and caring practices—be it for conventional research methods and contexts, be it for re-devised remote/digital methods and pandemic contexts—became more and more audible, even if this would imply to end a research quest for good in order not to overburden research participants and not to exacerbate pandemic-related emergencies of already marginalised groups. Decentring research design practices and revisiting the weighing of perspectives of what kind of knowledge is important, relevant as well as how phenomena are conceptualised were highlighted in a significantly increased manner. (See Garthwaite 2020; Pacheco & Zaimağaoğlu 2020). We need to carefully reflect where do we look, what experiences we refer to, of what is on our radar (and what is not and why) when establishing a compass for our knowledge quests, which are no means in themselves, academically detached from ground realities and concerns. What is the centre of our research, or on what premises is it centred? What knowledge is needed and for what purpose painfully asks, for example, our

collaborating author Rahat Batool when confronted with risky and precarious research settings in already impoverished, marginalised communities where research barely generates an impact.

Outlining the need for context-sensitive research ethical applications, Dawson et al. (2020) see the issue of research ethics as even more pronounced in pandemic times, be it in terms of design, implementation and dissemination of non-extractive research practices. Standing in the line of decolonial, indigenous and feminist key principles of interdependent, equality- and fairness-oriented, diversity-inclusive and empathic we-consciousness, they spotlight solidarity, equal moral respect, equity, autonomy, vulnerability and trust as key concerns of research ethical practices and pandemic knowledge productions.

In their edited volumes collection, featuring experiences and concerns from ninety collaborators worldwide, Kara and Khoo (2020) present three key lessons from early responses to researching in pandemic times. First, that digital methods allowed for flexibility in data collection and triggered creative responses in readapting or shifting methods employed. Second, the digital divide became a more complex research ethical challenge to navigate—be it over concerns for marginalised groups or for particularly exposed groups such as frontline workers. Shifting to digital methods means dealing with complex ethical dimensions of the digital divide—be it in terms of digital access or digital literacy or substitute data sets and sample populations. Third, Kara and Khoo point towards shifting power relations and a reconsideration of who is how vulnerable in pandemic research settings, questioning entire research inquiries and their necessity (Kara & Khoo 2020).

The notion of care does not only extend to research participants and collaborators, but also to researchers themselves, often considered privileged and in power in research settings, which became more than often challenged and reversed in pandemic settings along gendered and racialised cleavages (see also subsequent articles of our collaborating authors in this special section of the *South Asia Chronicle*). Ugarte (2020) points towards questions of resilience in times marked by 'profound disruptions' causing stress and a sense of uncertain, long durée 'crisis' given the compounding challenges in pandemic times to our lifeworlds. 'Overall, social scientists are rather poorly trained when it comes to engaging with the emotionality that their research generates', argues Ugarte (2020), and critiques that '[w]e often tend to downplay the mental burden that our research imposes upon us out of fear showing vulnerability to the outside world', and instead of providing institutional responses and thus 'care modalities oriented toward

researchers' resilience with regard to the emotional challenges that research in crisis entails'. Negotiating one's positionality and ethical responsibility as an academic (and human being) in face of traumatic or stressful encounters has been a daunting journey and baggage for many critical, engaged social scientists to shoulder. Experiences of powerlessness, of not being able to do enough beyond (or despite) the metric-oriented, competitive academic work, of only being able to 'give back' with a taste of inadequacy/insufficiency or even tokenism or researcher-centred face saving have been known to lead to feelings ranging from fatigue, numbing, cynicism, hyper-vigilance, disassociation or others (see Selim 2021; Ansoms 2020; Ugarte 2020; Lunn 2014).

Questions of researchers' mental health and coping strategies for emotional stress, pain and trauma have been discussed by many, particularly when working in and on the Global South in volatile contexts or when working from a critical approach, be it for example from gender studies, peace and conflict studies, human geography or anthropology, where contexts of multi-layered, compounded crises, volatilities, inequalities and uncertainties are the everyday normal matrix to operate within, not an exceptional, temporary crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic is regarded by many in the Global North. Stressors to a researcher's resilience in terms of mental and physical health can be induced due to (1) the research field parameters and encounters made, for example in volatile contexts or conflict settings, (2) the research topic, its urgency, sensitivity, straining or even traumatising nature and subsequent emotional, psycho-social toll, (3) the embeddedness in the field and lack of distancing, (4) the urgency of the research and its entanglement with a researcher's own non-academic context and personal life (see Selim 2021; Ansoms 2020; Bond, Lake & Parkinson 2020; Günel et al. 2020 and the other articles in this special issue).

Pointing to 'the potentially unrecognized "dehumanization" that Covid-19 might bring' and concerns for the need of human interaction and togetherness that many around the world express in light of harsh pandemic governmentalities such as lockdowns or physical distancing protocols, Shankar (2020) criticises how little emotions feature in social science research practices (see further previous work by Moser 2008 or Lunn 2014). Given her fieldwork experiences, Shankar (2020) considers emotions as 'productive for human understanding' and problematises that scholars contain and obliterate them when publishing their 'expertise'. For Shankar (2020), the 'social control of emotions is an act of power', of silencing and 'reinscribing oppression'; such social distancing practices of academic knowledge productions do require a reconsideration, a paradigmatic shift, not only due to the shortcomings, fault

lines and challenges this 'pandemic world of radical uncertainty' (re)exposed.

> Emotions are not equal, neither is the ability to express or control them. Feelings, grounded in material realities, like grief, fear of getting sick and depression, deserve more attention as we social scientists confront more openly why field research has been and is increasingly difficult or impossible for many. (Shankar 2020; see also Günel et al. 2020)

Emotions—from 'micro to the macro levels of social, communal, and political expression and action'—can thus serve as a guiding force in our (post-)pandemic ethical compass, to be considered 'along with privilege and positionality, as a new ethical turn as we confront the changing landscape of field research and its relationship to expertise' (Shankar 2020; Chilisa 2012; Moser 2008; see also the contributions of Zuberi, Batool et al. in this special section).

Linked to the multi-dimensional and multi-directional notion of care in pandemic research ethics are renewed calls for slow research / science, questioning the timing, pace and rigid sequencing of research steps in times of a pandemic crisis and its long aftermath. These ethics of care should also extend to teaching and supervision (see also Ansoms 2020; Christia & Lawson 2020; Das 2020). For Backe (2021), 'ethics of crisis' renew the urgency for slow research and a 'practice of pragmatic solidarity' with their research partners, for example when dealing with gender-based violence, regarded as one of the most concerning shadow pandemics of the COVID-19 pandemic itself. In her call for slow research and adequate ethical responses, Backe (2021) argues:

> […] solidarity emerges through a locally situated and grounded ethics of concern that is attentive to the particular temporalities and extractive logics of academic research. In these cases, research is oriented not by the "tyranny of the urgent" or the neoliberal demands of the academy, but rather by the priorities and needs of the community participating in the research.

A slow research approach is essentially one in tune with concerns highlighted in decentred, decolonial and feminist approaches (see Hussain 2020; Chilisa 2012; Ackerley & True 2010; Smith 2008). The research designed is not shaped and decided upon by the researcher in the academic field, but in the local field by experts on the ground; it allows for reflective pauses, even a suspension, reorientation or abandonment of research projects (see for instance Gore et al. 2021; Günel et al. 2020; Hussain 2020; Kara & Khoo 2020).

> The COVID-19 pandemic also opens up questions about research timing. These include not just how we do research and the ethical

questions of continuing to research, even in novel ways, during Covid, but also *whether* we continue to do research, the complications of postponement and restarting research, and the implications of cancellation. There may be situations in which the most ethical response is to weigh the value of research itself against the dangers, rather than merely seeking ways to continue while minimizing danger. Alternatively, putting research on hold raises questions about responsibility to participants, time-sensitive data, and unfinished projects. (Carayannis & Bolin 2020)

The widespread lockdown approach predominant in the Global North left many researchers involuntarily immobile, disconnected from the physical field and with 'new' ethical and methodological challenges in light of pandemic disruptions and the need for remote research. While one could argue that those previously privileged are now facing the opposite, others argue that we need to draw a more careful picture. Dunia et al. (2020) critique a certain 'Northern naval gazing', as the praxis of remote research and contracting researchers is not novel, given that in pre-pandemic times security concerns already meant that many Global North-based researchers would limit themselves to safer (often urban) settings and commission local researchers for more risky data collection, thus exposing the latter to 'exploitative and unequal research relationships an partnerships instead of nurturing the coproduction of knowledge'.

392

One key article repeatedly debated, contested and referred to in our working group was written by Azmar Neyenyezi Bisoka (2020), who critiques the 'colonial relationship that has plagued social sciences for the last four centuries, which has often made invisible the work of local researchers from the Global South'. Challenging the notion of pandemic-induced transformations and opportunities to rethink power relations in research designs and practices, as prevalent in academic writings and blog entries of 2020 and 2021 surrounding notions of 'ethics of care' and 'justice' and 'solidarity', Bisoka (2020) instead points to the need 'for the decolonization of knowledge' given compounded precarities and vulnerabilities of Global South researchers partaking in Global North-centred research projects, caused by the colonial momentum and its continued racialised legacies for academic research.

> […], Covid-19 is not an "event", an accident that radically reverses the normal order of things. It does not contain the conditions for a radical change in the phenomenon of the exploitation of certain bodies for research purposes. Those bodies have one colour: Black. […] For researchers in the Global North, Covid-19 is also not an event. This is a problem requiring the re-organization of the whole system of knowledge production. It allows Global North researchers to avoid exposure to dangerous fieldwork. […] Black bodies continue to brave the risks of difficult fieldwork, including those

posed by Covid-19. (Bisoka 2020, see also the experiences of authors in this special section e.g. Rahat Batool, Rahat Shah, Mehwish Zuberi or Aseela Haque)

For Bisoka (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic raises severe episteme-ological, political and (research) ethical questions to tackle the coloniality of academic research practices for researchers based in the Global North and Global South.

> The quest to decolonize knowledge should not become a new form of humanitarianism in which researchers from the North, one again, play savior to researchers from the South. The decolonization of knowledge pertains to issues of alienation, and requires awareness and responsibility on the part of researchers from the South as they navigate unequal power relations. (Bisoka 2020; see also Baczko & Dorronsoro 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020)

Referring to notions of care and 'ethical responsibilities toward those on whose lives and through whose labour we build our careers and enjoy professional success', Dunia et al. (2020) call for a rethinking of author-ship notions along with remaking compensation, remuneration as well as insurance practices for local research counterparts. Monson (2020) propositions for trans-regional research practices that 'ethical collabo-ration requires trust and mutual respect', nurtured by long-term relationships and networks, set within institutional arrangements, that allow for 'equitable relationships of mutual respect, transparency, and trust'. Crivello and Favara (2020: 1) revisit issues such as reciprocity, trust, power, vulnerability and inequality in research relationships in light of 'pandemic-instigated "ethics of disruption" for social sciences world-wide' from the perspective of longitudinal research, significantly destabi-lised in a mid- as well as long-term perspective.

393

> It feels as though we have entered a new ethical landscape, one that is compelling social researchers to re-examine previously held assumptions about what is appropriate, possible, valuable and relevant for their research, and the nature of ethical responsibilities to all those emeshed in the research relationship during this time […]. (Crivello & Favara 2020: 1)[6]

Rethinking methods in pandemic times: of old friends and new discoveries (Sarah Holz)

Throughout the review it has become clear that research designs and research methods require revisiting. Many studies '(re-)discovered' online and telephone interviews and surveys as the remedy for travel bans and contact restrictions (Góralska 2020; Gummer et al. 2020; Lawrence 2020; Khan in this special section). Others halted studies in the hope that they would be able to go back to the field soon and a third

group sought to continue their work, sometimes through different means (Gummer et al. 2020; Hall et al. 2020; Mwambari 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020; Batool et al.; Zuberi in this special section). The studies raised a few salient general questions: Are shifts in research design and research methods possible, especially when studies are already in progress? How can we ensure to take intentional rather than rushed decisions in this regard? What kinds of research methods are appropriate vis-a-vis hygiene and social-distancing rules and regulations and the principle of do no harm? How do the changed conditions impact sampling and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion? What kinds of data can be ethically collected under these conditions, and, more broadly, what is data? Lastly, what constitutes the field? The insights and experiences of scholars who work in crisis- or in online-/remote-contexts were very instructive.

Data collection was at the heart of most discussions and reflections. In contrast, only a few publications discussed data dissemination and outreach and there were hardly any deliberations about the potential impacts of the pandemic on data classification and data analysis. This attests to a general trend 'of uncoupling the "collection" (i.e. production) of data, from its analysis and theorization' which is 'more a function of institutional power relations than of epistemological debates' (Baczko & Dorronsoro 2020) because it renders those who collect and produce the primary data (i.e. local research assistants) largely invisible. This aspect has been discussed earlier on.

The literature we reviewed focused almost exclusively on qualitative research methods. A number of articles adopted argumentation strategies to demonstrate the utility and value of qualitative and mixed-method, online research and rapid evaluations (Howlett 2021; DeHart 2020; Góralska 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020) to understand lived experiences and explain social phenomena such as the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories or opposition to vaccinations and medical. Similarly, a number of researchers who have researched online environments or who have collected data via digital means spoke up to refute common assumptions about digital methods. The fact that many of these reflections adopt a mode of argumentation that seeks to establish the legitimacy and validity of these approaches vis-a-vis "hard" data, notions of "the field" as well as quantitative approaches suggests that the pandemic has revealed dominant discourses about what constitutes "good" research. It has cast a spotlight on methods and approaches that have often been struggling to be taken seriously and who are now able to reposition their approaches and methods (Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Góralska 2020; Hall et al. 2020; Howlett 2021;

Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020). Further, the pandemic has highlighted the disparate experiences of Global North and Global South scholars that also require more attention.

Digital research methods and online spaces have emerged as a central site of engagement. To continue their studies a number of scholars switched to remote work accessing their 'fields' via digitally mediated means. Consequently, they were then confronted with new sets of challenges. Various scholars who have worked in the field of digital ethnographies started to speak up and they cautioned that online research is not intuitive, which has been a common assumption in the wider research community but requires specialised training and skills as well as preparation (Góralska 2020). A switch from offline to online, mediated and remote modes therefore requires careful consideration. Góralska (2020) suggests that most studies that have switched online extended their fieldwork online by adding one digital component, their work thus does not fall strictly within the category of digital fieldwork because many researchers did not have the appropriate training.

Moreover, the data collected online differs from data collected in the physical field and thus requires different interpretation. These are important points to keep in mind when evaluating findings but also when reading studies that were conducted over the past few months, yet very few scholars flagged the implications of the changed conditions for data analysis and assessment. Especially longitudinal and comparative studies have to address the concern whether the data collected during the pandemic should be treated as an exception, this also begs the question, when does the pandemic end and conditions are back to 'normal'? (Gummer et al. 2020) It is understandable that few scholars have engaged with these broader and structural issues because most were engaged in mitigating the immediate effects of the pandemic, but eventually these questions have to be answered collaboratively (see also Batool et al.; Khan in this special section).

Maybe because only few scholars had expertise in digital methods and because many did not have much time to redraw their study designs due to tight project timelines, there was little variation in the suggested methods of data collection. Almost all boiled down to a shift from synchronous face-to face interactions to digitally mediated synchronous interviews or surveys or to surveys sent via email or in the form of online forms to be filled by respondents at their leisure. They thus remained within the framework of established and recognised data collection methods maybe out of fear that their inquiries would not be validated by the wider researcher community and did not fit funding demands

(Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Hall et al. 2020).

Another reason might be that the development of innovative approaches requires time and planning, which means variations in research approaches can only be judged in a few years, once studies have been conducted and results published. Yet, there were some scholars who seized the opportunity to incorporate data collection methods and types of data that are less known. A number of scholars used messaging apps to stay in touch with their respondents; thus, rather than netnographies, they were conducting chatnographies (Käihkö 2020; see also: Khan in this special section). These apps enabled them to move beyond calls and text messages, but also include pictures, videos and voice notes that enabled asynchronous conversations (Kara 2020). Consequently, the role of respondents as co-producers is enhanced because they can decide which data format they are comfortable with and they participate more actively in the data collection processes. The pandemic thus presents an opportunity to use more participatory methods (Hall et al. 2021; Mitlin et al. 2020) that also benefit communities. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2020) and Hall et al. (2020) have also emphasised the utility of auto-ethnographies in periods when access to sources is difficult. The pandemic has thus highlighted that mixed-method and mixed-data approaches and multiple (online/offline) sites might be one way to enhance the validity and feasibility of research projects in uncertain times.

One advantage of synchronous online interviews and surveys is that it places more trust in participants and invests them with more agency because participants can choose the location of the interview easily. Marnie Howlett collected the major portion of her interviews on nationalism and self-identification with elites and ordinary citizens in Ukraine before the onset of the pandemic. She switched to online interviews for the follow up and was thus in the fortunate position to offer comparative insights. She notes that the content of the zoom interviews did not differ significantly from face-to-face interviews instead, the behaviour of her interview partners changed, they appeared more relaxed and also included more private topics, such as child care, in their conversations. In her case, physical proximity and co-location was therefore not the only decisive variable for rapport building but rather co-presence (Howlett 2021). Other authors echo her experiences: 'Being there' is therefore more than being physically present (Käihkö 2020; see also: Chowdhry, Ross & Swallow 2020); it is about context-sensitivity, providing space for empathy and respect for the needs of those we work with. Online and physical presence are therefore unstable categories and the roles we occupy as researchers in these settings are

equally unstable (Howlett 2021; Hussain 2020). These scholars thus suggest that common assumptions about the requirement of physical presence and immersion for valid data collection might need revisiting. However, rapport building for studies that depend on standardised quantitative data sets might find switching to technologically-mediated environments more difficult because it affects response rates (Gummer et al. 2020).

A number of scholars were enthusiastic about the potential of telephone and online research because it allows reaching new and larger populations (Carayannis & Bolin 2020). At the same time, it also excludes large portions of society. Moreover, during the pandemic a number of data platforms became open-access, which allows more researchers to benefit from the available data. Data sharing and open-access enables researcher triangulation and thus increase the validity of the data and it might also lead to new discoveries (Guiterrez & Li 2020; Tabasso 2020). To enhance data quality, various authors called for the homogenisation of data collection practices (Guiterrez & Li 2020) without reflecting on who would collect the data under what kinds of conditions and how adequate training could and would be imparted. Moreover, access to data is only the first step, how large amount of data can be used to disseminate findings and enhance expert and general understanding is another necessary step in this process. Hence, data dissemination plans, including public outreach and community translations should become staples in research designs (Taster 2020; Vindrola-Padros 2020). Moreover, Góralska (2020) points to the ethical dilemmas of lurking and the merging of the public and private in online environments as important points to consider especially legal implycations. When researchers use data from social media and other online platforms in how far do they need to ask for consent from users of such platforms to observe discussions and to utilise user comments as primary sources?

The volume of data that has been collected over the past months, especially via digital means highlights existing concerns about data surveillance, data-colonialism and the safe transmission and storage of data (Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020; Madianou 2019). Especially in contexts where digital and privacy laws are weak this is a major concern, similarly, many researchers neither have the awareness and technical knowledge nor the resources to practice safe data transmission and storage.

The possibility to move online depends on specific research questions and topics. For some topics co-location is important, either because of

397

the nature of the research question or because the persons and groups are hard to reach via online means, or do not trust technically-mediated communication.

Consequently, we have to ask are online contexts and digital research methods substitutes or alternatives to research methods in the physical field? Which opportunities and what kinds of new biases and exclusions are created through a focus on the online world and online research methods? This raises another salient question, who can we reach through online methods and who is excluded? Various scholars note, that much of the current digital research focuses on those with access to the internet and mobile phones thereby crowding out those who either do not have technical literacy or those who do not have access to such resources (Betts, Easton-Calabria & Pinnock 2020; Chung, Xu & Zhang 2020; Madianou 2019). This highlights the importance of conscious sampling strategies.

Many of those researchers who were not able to move their studies online and whose research required traveling to other countries or regions, decided to hire research assistants or collaborate with local partners. While scholars and organisations have drafted protocols for safe data collection during the pandemic (Christia & Lawson 2020; Duangana 2020; IFRC 2020; Jowett 2020; Nind et al. n.d.), the question how to collaborate and co-create ethically under such asymmetrical power conditions is a dilemma that requires attention and that has been discussed in the previous section in more detail. Such kinds of asymmetrical research collaborations in terms of risk, compensation, insurance raises fundamental questions about Global North-South collaborations in general (Baczko & Dorronsoro 2020; Bisoka 2020; Dunia 2020). DeHart rightly points out that 'collaboration means recognizing the different conditions that shape how we do what we do and how we know what we know and working to mitigate varying levels of risk assumed by individual collaborators' (2020: 4).

Rethinking collaboration also entails decentring common conceptions about authorship and ownership of data (Alio et al. 2020; Dunia 2020; Mitlin et al. 2020). Currently, research is focused on single-author, rather than team-based, projects which obfuscates the role of research partners whose role was pivotal in the research process but because they were employed, the researcher with access to funding 'owns' the data and can make exclusive use of it (Baczko & Dorronsoro 2020; Bisoka 2020; DeHart 2020; Dunia 2020). More transdisciplinary team-based work that also caters to the needs of communities also entails that research objectives of all participating partners should be aligned

which requires agreement-finding.

A number of scholars asked in their published deliberations whether it was ethical to continue doing research and collect data during the pandemic (Gummer et al. 2020; Käihkö 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020). There are concerns that researchers might interfere with the provision of essential service delivery or data collection. Surveys and interviews constitute additional burdens on persons who are already struggling and negatively affect their well-being (Dhungana 2020; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2020). At the same time, giving up on research for these reasons might also be detrimental because needs assessments and the documentation of the impact of the pandemic are as necessary as is research on other topics that were already important before the pandemic (Christia & Lawson 2020).

What we can take away from these reflections and inquiries is that messiness and complexity are a structural feature of everyday social lives, including academic lives; however, the sense that knowledge is limited and situated was not yet present in all disciplines and fields of study. The pandemic has demonstrated that research should take these circumstances into account (Law 2004).

399

Lastly, the pandemic has highlighted the need to consider a broader range of options when designing studies. This entails transcending pre-conceived notions and stereotypes about certain research sites or research methods. In order to plan more consciously, more honest reflections and experience sharing is necessary and the planning and scoping phases of research projects should be taken more serious and need not to be rushed (Vindrola-Padros 2020; Vindrola-Padros & Vindrola-Padros 2018). The reflections also highlight that notions about what constitutes research, as well as the assessment criteria that provide the scaffolding for these conceptions require a careful and critical decentring towards collaborative practices. This includes possibilities of multiple data-, author- and owner-ship and multi-authored publications that place equal emphasis on each contributing author. The pandemic has opened up opportunities for enhancing the validity of various methods and practices and it has enabled innovative approaches, however, 'the problem is not lack of practice but what matters' (Law 2004: 4). This means, funding and assessment frame-works should be open for innovation and creativity, for collaboration, partnership and for sustained engagement provide the foundation for any of these endeavours. As Nicholas points out, especially for early career researchers, academic institutions have contradictory expec-tations: cutting edge research is supposed to take place in conservative

settings (Nicholas 2020; see also Batool et al. in this special section).

Reconceptualizing research for post-pandemic times: food for thought and open questions (Andrea Fleschenberg)

One key feature in our working group's discussions was how we conceptualise, approach and navigate the "field" not only before, during and beyond pandemic times (see Günel et al. 2020). While some saw the COVID-19 pandemic as a rupture which 'demands that we revisit, rethink and re-articulate our forms of knowledge production' (Hussain 2020) in often painful, confusing and anxious ways of (self-)questioning and institutional bargaining with funding limitations and career metrics, this was not the case for all. Some challenged this notion of "rupture", "exception" or "crisis" given the everyday realities experienced in the various "fields" academics are involved in. Others were used to "researching sideways" in volatile contexts with the ongoing pandemic as an added layer of complications and disruptions to navigate (see Vithal 2011). Yet, some entered the (substitute) remote field of digital research with ambivalent feelings and mixed experiences—be it in terms of collapsed notions of temporal and spatial distance, be it in terms of navigating sensitive topics and uncertain research relationships or opportunities available (Hussain 2020, see experiences of Rahat Shah, Mateeullah Tareen, Salman Khan, Sumrin Kalia and Rahat Batool in this special section). While it is too early to pinpoint how the current pandemic has impacted knowledge productions and research practices, if there are shifts or turns or ruptures, we would like to end this exploratory mapping of ours and before giving the long overdue space to our authors' collective with some spotlights for further food for thought and open questions.

Contested conceptual roadmaps and guidelines: some thoughts on negations, absences, distortions

Turning one side of our cognitive landscape and compass upside down or front to back, we need to carefully carve out and reflect if the pandemic lens is the only appropriate one here or not. Scrutinising the building blocks and moving parts of our research practices in epistemic, methodological and ethical terms, which rely on conceptual parameters and indicators, scopes and scales, we have to constantly question and remind ourselves of our own limitations, blind spots, epistemic silences and emergencies—or in other words: What slips through the cracks, what and who is counted, heard and visualised or not (Appadurai et al. 2021).

400

A number of blind spots in our ever more conscientious intersectional power matrix are linked to our practices about those in liminal or peripheral spaces and status ascriptions, which travel for instance to our conceptualisations of citizenship, political subjectivities, agency, participation, everyday life or normative orders in times of 'exception', 'crisis', 'uncertainty' and subsequent cognitive dissonances. Let us point the spotlight to about a third of our world population: Children, particularly harshly affected by worldwide pandemic governmentalities with little voice, visibility and counting in pandemic deliberations. In long term perspective and what is discoursed about as "the new normal" in post-pandemic times, how do we approach in our knowledge productions and research practices the fact that 'as what comes after, if anything, will be lived out by those who are still young' (Appadurai et al. 2021), including the multi-dimensional pandemic fallouts and legacies? Veena Das (2020) refers to a 'lost generation in the making' and the responsibilities this entails for current times and research practices, conscious that this is also an 'epidemic of ignorance in which epi-models fail to incorporate how human beings under different circumstances behave, and what impact it has on modelling and predictions' (Jishnu Das as quoted in ibid.).

401

Paying attention to children's experiences during this pandemic is essential. These are world historical conditions in the formation of childhood and they will leave lasting and still unknown effects on social orders and political imaginations around the globe. […] Children may be immune from the worst effects of this illness but they are not immune from the experience of life at home with anxious, overworked, scared, and confused adults. Given that the ordinary forms of growing up can already feel like a crisis, which features of this time will stand out? […] There is little trace of children's voices in the records of academic journals. The citizens who will forge the public culture and the political futures of life in constant crisis are currently less than ten years old. Suffice it to say that the emergent politics of childhood and children turns out to have much to do with who counts, who speaks, and what we rely on our children to filter out and sometimes to mask. (Appadurai et al. 2021)

The digital turn in Social Sciences: issues of remote embeddedness and altered research practices

Digital research methods and subsequent research ethical navigations in terms of process, situatedness and embeddedness are not novel (Howell 2021; Tiidenberg 2020; see further: Lam et al. 2020; Roberts 2015). What might be novel is the scope and scale of a potential digital turn in academia as many of us 'rethink how many academic practices might take place in virtual environments' (Carrigan 2020), such as

webinars and online conferences, digital research collaborations in multi-sited research teams or the use of social media for 'the democratization of academic knowledge' (Das & Ahmed 2020)? A digital turn in academic practices and encounters allows us to bridge financial constraints, time management challenges as well as concerns of sustainability while at the same time exposing us to new work-life balance and research ethical challenges due to digital scholarship. Suffice to mention issues of traceability and informed consent, governmental surveillance technologies of online spaces or hacking of cloud-based collaboration platforms (See Hantrais et al. 202; Chowdhry et al. 2020).

But more fundamentally: research phenomena, vocabularies, spaces, tools, relationships and interactions are reshaped, are hence in need to be consciously reflected upon and carefully re-calibrated, not only but also when entangled with pandemic (re)productions of inequalities, silences and emergencies. We require an 'additional layer of reflexivity', because '[i]f methods shape how and what we know and are always political […] – what kind of social realities do we want to create or bring into being?' (Chowdhury et al. 2020)

Our own informal conversations with a number of colleagues also point to a different set of limitations and side effects of digital research practices. During the past few months, scholars who were actively engaged in research projects had to take many hard choices under conditions of uncertainty and precarity. More than ever, the decision-making process would have benefited from informal exchanges and chit chats in the kitchen or over coffee between classes or during informal conversations with our interlocutors and research collaborators, instead most of us had to take these decisions on our own in relative isolation and without much feedback. The pandemic has highlighted the need for safe spaces to voice concerns and discuss what we are working on. To ensure that such formal and informal platforms exist should remain one point on our list of priorities.

Slow science and ethics of care

Writing at the end of 2021 where some have just passed another pandemic wave while some are entering the fourth wave, experiencing long-term draining and a kind of pandemic fatigue as well as adjustment vis-à-vis anxieties and uncertainties, the prominent calls for slow science and ethics of care hit a pandemic 'kaleidoscope in terms of change and patterns' (Hussain 2020). Hussain (2020) argues that slow science 'calls for unsettling the stable typologies drawn from structures of theory and

knowledge we are trained in […], in order to enter the unknown territories' in this 'project of academic self-regulation' of pandemic research. Similarly, Corbera et al. (2020: 192) opines that 'academic praxis should value forms of performance and productivity that enhance wellbeing and care together with solidarity and pluralism'. But how many of us were allowed to slow down or had the resources and spaces to do so, to imagine and engage slowly, with care? What spaces of solidarity and (co-)mentoring were opened up and maintained over the past nearly two years of pandemic experiences or what structures and inequalities actually became more entrenched or widened (Harle 2020; Young 2020)? What new vulnerabilities, risks and exposures emerged? Were institutional spaces, curricula and practices re-aligned with the need for slow science and ethics of care or did this call wither away in the halls of academia once the first, second or third lockdowns ended? (De Gruyter 2020; Smith & Watchom 2020) Are there spaces that encourage researchers, students and those we co-research with to share their struggles and to set collective goals that are aligned with different needs? (Corbera et al. 2020; Das 2020) How to deal with a longing for 'back to normal' or a post-pandemic 'new normal' in social sciences (Fadaak et al. 2020)? Lastly, Dunia (2020) reminds us that a re-orientation and the setting of new standards is not only necessary on the institutional level but it is also necessary to incorporate solidarity and decolonality into our individual practices and decision-making (see also Martin 2021).

403

Gökce Günel, Saiba Varma and Chika Watanabe (2020) present us with an interesting proposal in their *Manifesto for patchwork ethnography*, inviting us to probe taken-for-granted notions of field and home, footprints and scope of fieldwork practices—not only given that a 'return to "normal"' might never be possible (or, we add here, also fundamentally problematic in itself). Speaking from a decolonial and feminist approach, they call for us to carefully dismantle the black box of the personal-political-professional nexus of knowledge productions and to scrutinise how to innovate 'methods and epistemologies to contend with intimate, personal, political, and material concerns' embedded in complex knowledge production processes. This includes the need to reconceptualise notions of 'going' and 'travelling', the 'field', 'modes of "being there"' and maintaining research relationships, new modes of data collection as well as 'rethink[ing] *temporalization* of data collection and analysis' (ibid.). Or, in other words, 'refigure what counts as knowledge and what does not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can transform realities that have been described to us as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights' (Günel et al. 2020).

Endnotes

[1] We conducted a close reading of over 150 articles, blog posts and talk/webinar recordings. Since the topic was part of our everyday research and teaching lives, we also include information in this literature review that came to us in different contexts and encounters. In our search we used keywords such as COVID, corona, pandemic in combination with research, research ethics, research methods, knowledge production, data analysis, fieldwork, global south. Apart from targeted searches in key databases such as google scholar or online library catalogues, we also scoured through well-known academic blogs and journals.

[2] *Covid-19: Toward a Post-COVID-19 Sociology (Prof. Sari Hanafi)*, YouTube uploaded by j.michaelsociology, 10.05.21,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXVg_MjGqjA.

[3] As Chandler (2020) mentions, this is not pandemic-specific, but linked to wider concerns (and subsequent multi-dimensional pandemic ramifications) put forward by thinkers and movements critical of the Anthropocene.

[4] Please see also various posts on the blog New Mandala, https://www.newmandala.org/.

[5] A comparatively larger proportion of publications addressed the effect of the pandemic on teaching at schools, e.g. Jawed & Hasan 2020; Mbunge et al. 2020; Nirwana, Haliah & Firmansyah 2020.

[6] Studying childhood poverty in a multidisciplinary, multi-sited, longitudinal research endeavour in over 100 communities, ranging from Africa, the Americas, to South and Southeast Asia, and accustomed to dealing with disruptions, the pandemic changed the ways of doing research, of negotiating research ethics and challenges faced, of data collected along with the phenomenon under investigation itself given the myriad pandemic implications and the longevity of pandemic effects. Revisiting and reconsidering notions of vulnerability, care and solidarity as part of researchers' ethical responsibilities was one key challenge highlighted. (Crivello and Favara 2020: 2-9; see also Kalia this special section).

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411

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