questions of reciprocity, solidarity and obligation. Every patient chart, every documented encounter, is an unflattering look into our devastatingly leaky social safety net.

The virus continues to unmask the consequences of our late capitalist social order, which differentially exposes communities to death (Taylor 2020). In Philadelphia, these are apparent in statistics collected by our public health officials, which reveal that it is easiest to get tested in our affluent neighbourhoods, despite a larger number of cases in poorer communities. To get a test outside of a hospital, you must wait in a drive-through line, leaving those without cars to scramble for other means of testing.

Meanwhile, my peers are still collecting PPE. My partner and I, not generally prone to crafting, pull out a long-neglected set of sewing machines to produce masks for ourselves and friends as the recommendations shift and community use of masks is encouraged. We draw on his expertise as an engineer to design and fabricate alternatives to N95 surgical masks, anticipating a day when our doctor and nurse friends will go to work to find protection absent. I'm reminded of a message my mother sent me early in the pandemic, as critical shortages of PPE became apparent and her daily work in the hospital revealed an overwhelming lack of preparedness. The message said simply: 'No gloves. No eyewear. No PPE. Who's [this] s**thole country now?'

It has become increasingly difficult to gain the distance from this pandemic that would allow me to make sense of it. At the same time, there has been a veritable boom in social theory since the pandemic began. Every day, advertisements for webinars and digital lectures fill my inbox. Calls for papers have already pivoted around this latest crisis, and I expect to see dozens of COVID-19-related panels at the next big conference. A prominent social theorist has already penned a book about the pandemic. I feel self-conscious about my dulled capacity to distance, to theorize, to make sense of something which is overwhelming and surreal. It is true that as anthropologists, we are precisely in the business of making sense of what is going on around us. Perhaps it is a need for control, the will to know, that impels us to attempt to tame what ultimately can't be tamed.

Or maybe it makes us feel that we know what's going to happen, despite knowing better that none of us do. ●

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1. A summary of this information can be found in The Pew Charitable Trusts' report (2020). It is worth noting that the federal poverty line is only one of the many ways of characterizing widespread precarity in the city of Philadelphia, though it is most often cited.

2. Here, I am thinking especially of some of the compelling contributions to Somatosphere's COVID-19 forum, particularly Adia Benton's elaboration of the racialized geography of blame (Benton 2020).

3. Also see: MacGregor (2020); Street & Kelly (2020).

4. It is worth noting that it is not always the case that medical students are healthy and that this elides those who are living with chronic illness or are otherwise at risk.

5. I heard rumours before I started to see formal reporting, like Nyoka (2020). Also, a later account describes the family's perspective (Mushava 2020).

6. It is worth noting that the use of invasive ventilation for Covid-19 is contested terrain, with considerable disagreement about when to intubate, the ethics of early intubation and the potential harm to patients of overly aggressive care.

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COVID-19: THE 'INVISIBLE ENEMY' AND CONTINGENT RACISM
Reflections of an Italian anthropologist conducting fieldwork in Greece

Athens airport, 25 February 2020: the Covid-19 virus hell in Italy is just beginning. I arrived in Greece in early February before the chaos started; today, I am heading to Kavála, the field base for my comparative project on the protest movements against the Trans Adriatic Pipeline in Greece and southern Italy. Out of habit, twice, perhaps three times, I say '*grazie*' as I navigate airport procedures. It's enough to elicit worried looks and whispered comments among the bystanders. A sudden and uncomfortable feeling grips me. The next day, Greece records its first Covid-19 case, 'imported' from Italy.

Ever since that announcement, an invisible wall has arisen between me and my Greek neighbours. Soon, it also affects my fieldwork. 'I don't speak to Italians' I overhear while sitting in the car of one of my informants, as he calls a fellow activist and introduces me. Next day, immediately after he posts a picture of us on Facebook, the warnings fly: 'Be careful! You're not even wearing masks!' Though followed by smiley emojis, such 'joking' remarks are anything but.

Then there's the street vendor's inquisitive and concerned look when he places my accent, my neighbour's 'teasing' gesture of shielding himself from me by forming an X with his arms, and the pharmacist who suddenly steps back and denies me the much-requested disinfectant hand gel as it is destined 'only for local customers' – while grunting. In response, I speak as little as possible to avoid making mistakes in Greek and to 'hide' my nationality.

This hits me particularly hard as I'm usually warmly received in Greece. I'm a southern Italian who grew up in Salento (Puglia), where a variety of Greek – 'Griko' – is still spoken. On this shore of the shared sea, Griko tends to elicit admiration and self-celebratory comments about the durability of Hellenism. Suddenly I'm no longer called *i Ellinìda tis kato Italias* ('the Greek from southern Italy'). The distinction between purity and danger fills into symbolic – and physical – boundary maintenance, as Mary Douglas observed in her 1966 book *Purity and danger*. Abruptly, I'm simply Italian and Italian means 'polluted and polluting' – the enemy.

Meanwhile, gallows humour circulates via memes: 'Not finding a seat on the bus? No problem. Cough, say *Buongiorno a tutti* – "Good morning everyone [in Italian]" – and sit wherever you want!' (Facebook, 29 February).

Then again, irony can be a weapon as much as self-irony can be a defence: 'I'd say that if we keep coughing, we'll end up re-conquering the Roman Empire' (Facebook, 3 March).

However, as things in Italy take a catastrophic turn, and as infections climb in Greece, public expressions of concern and closeness towards Italians follow.

What goes around comes around?
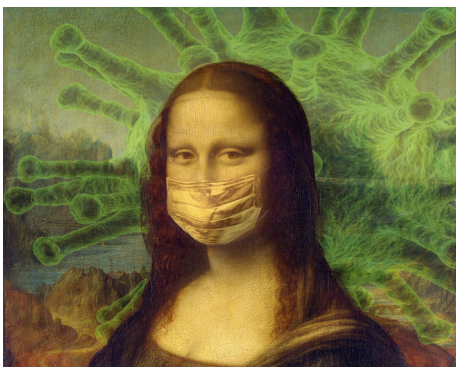When the Covid-19 nightmare started in

Fig. 1. *Mona Lisa protecting her environment from infection by Covid-19.*

January, Chinese people in Italy had likewise been discriminated against and stigmatized. Italians deserted Chinese owners' stores and restaurants. To keep their businesses open, some Chinese shop owners even let their Italian employees run them. A friend of mine saw a sign in a shop window that read: 'Every nation is able to take care of its own problems … It does not matter how hard it is. But in light of the fear of the corona virus, we have put management of our store entirely in the hands of our Italian team members. The staff' (Facebook, 4 February).

In the span of a month, Italians have been pointed at and marginalized on a global scale. Supposedly to defend Italians from increased international accusations of spreading the virus, the Veneto region's governor – and a Lega member[1] – blames the Chinese for the epidemic, suggesting it is the result of their low standard of hygiene and questionable diet. 'We have all seen Chinese eating live mice' (sic) he says.[2] Mary Douglas' arguments on taboo come to mind. The governor's words understandably provoke the disdain of the Chinese ambassador in Rome, who demands and obtains public apologies. A few days later, another diplomatic incident almost takes place, this time between Italy and France. A French TV station runs a mock advert for 'corona pizza'. In it, a coughing chef hacks green phlegm onto Italy's national dish.[3] Again, international apologies follow. Satire at the expense of Italy – and China – continues, while up to this point, the situation elsewhere in Europe and the world seems to be under control.

In appeals to their sense of *responsabilità personale* – 'personal responsibility' – Italians are prompted to stay home and so prevent others from getting infected. But as long as it's only a recommendation, Italians keep going out in public, failing to act in a responsible and 'disciplined' manner, incapable of acting for the common good, the argument goes.[4] *The New York Times* article of 8 March titled 'On day 1 of lockdown, Italian officials urge citizens to abide by rules' reported widely in Italian newspapers, pushes that point. It also dangerously resembles Banfield's (1958) argument about southern Italians' backwardness – this was based, he claimed, on their amoral behaviour and their inability to take collective action unless threatened with punishment.[4]

On 10 March the '*Io resto a casa*' decree ('I stay at home') is enforced in the entire peninsula. When, shortly after, the curve of contagion in southern Italy starts to rise dramatically, southerners are blamed for it; their panicked exodus from the north on the eve of the national quarantine supposedly shows their inability to behave morally. For, it is said, had they 'behaved morally', had they not fled to the south, the curve would not have gone up. The latitude of morality is reintroduced, so to speak, simultaneously hiding and revealing the divide between northern and southern Italy's respective health infrastructures.

The social distancing measures introduced by the national quarantine strengthen as time passes. Italians are no longer permitted to engage in outdoor exercise and violations are punishable by fines and prison. This climate generates a double-edged reaction: on the one hand, the contingent degree of top-down surveillance and militarization results in a Foucauldian 'panopticon' environment (Foucault 1977) and raises general concerns about the state of Italian democracy; on the other, it prompts surveillance from below, as Italians are encouraged to denounce any transgressors and report them to the competent authorities.

Recordings of angry people accusing their fellow citizens and neighbours for having returned from the northern regions, or for 'leaving their house' more than once a day, circulate on WhatsApp. Indeed, the boundaries between solidarity and surveillance keep shifting, contracting and expanding, as fear implodes and anger explodes among Italians.[5] The mechanism of social distancing not only contains contagion and the epidemic; it also turns itself into a contagious form of social control and surveillance, which is successful because it takes place behind the scenes.

Fig. 2. *Speaking through the eyes (Project EcoMostre).*

The 'invisible enemy' and contingent racism

'We are at war against an invisible enemy', the Italian prime minister keeps repeating, soon echoed by his counterparts in Europe and beyond. The very reappropriation of such terminology testifies to the migration of a style of discourse that by calling on the war scenario, supposedly tries to fill the sense of void introduced by this challenging turn of events. References to war are ubiquitous. Not coincidentally, Italian doctors and nurses are called heroes and martyrs – and they don't like it, as these labels detract attention from their precarious work conditions. Increasing numbers of them are dying, trying to save other people's lives.

By contrast, the war images on which politicians and people are drawing are different in essence: as regrettable as this is, where military battles have definable human enemies – with names, faces and flags – in the 'coronavirus war', the invisible enemy ultimately cannot be defined. Such an ubiquitous reference to the enemy, however, renders it a kind of 'floating signifier' à la Lévi-Strauss ([1951] 1987), an empty category – similar to Ardener's (1971) 'blank banners' – which is contingently filled and morally loaded.

Our enemy becomes whoever is the most easily identifiable, however transitory this identification is, as it shifts with the chronological and geographical scale of the epidemic. Indeed, 'the enemy' keeps changing: first the Chinese in Italy, then the Italians within Europe. Within Italy itself, first it's northern Italians who are blamed, then southern Italian youngsters returning from the north, then, one's own neighbours in a sort of zoom-in exercise. The enemy's invisibility would seem to be its only coherence, ultimately turning everyone into a potential enemy; the more you do not see it, the more you see it around you and eventually right beside you.

The enemy is, however, rendered visible through what I am calling *contingent racism*, such as that enacted by the Italians who deserted Chinese shops – absence can be more visible than presence after all (Herzfeld 2015).

Fig. 3. *2020 Italian government task force to face Covid-19 outbreak.*

This is the first time in history that the original is from China and the copy is from Milano.

Fig. 4. *Satire at the expense of Italy and China: 'This is the first time in history that the original is from China and the copy is from Milano'.*

This way, Italians' overall resentment towards Chinese migrants' business supremacy mingles with the pandemic, further feeding into cultural prejudice. Such forms of racism are not only contingent as they shift their targets of discrimination, but they may be expressed more or less subtly: at times simple details, and often non-verbal cues speak aloud, as it were – recall the street vendor's inquisitive and concerned look when he placed my Italian accent. Those shifts in speech or gesture to which ethnographers are generally – or should be – alerted, reveal the silenced; probably being Italian, and hence the contingent enemy, I was further alerted to that texture of fear that a simple look can render palpable.

Some contingent forms of racism may go unnoticed because of their subtlety; but they have also increasingly assumed a visible pattern. This is replicated through the use of ironic and satirical memes, of the kind described above, which flourish as visible responses to an invisible threat; they work in a similar way to disclaimers such as 'I am not a racist, but…', which as Herzfeld (2007) argues, become acceptable and hence more destructive through their rhetorical usage. In gallows humour memes, the disclaimer 'It's just for fun' – implied and taken as given – aims to sweeten the pill of discrimination; irony and satire, as one would expect, only succeed in making it more bitter. Such representations of the 'the invisible enemy' are, moreover, widely circulated through social media; their ubiquity renders them less noticeable, hence even more powerful.

Just like the non-racist disclaimers discussed by Herzfeld, such memes are strikingly similar from country to country. This visual rhetoric in fact proceeds from stereotypes and prejudices rooted in time and unearthed contingently; some of them are globally shared, and hence translated from one language to another, although they may equally be adapted to local sensitivities.

The overall genealogy of the enemy therefore rests on pre-existing categories, such as nations – themselves entangled with a variety of tropes of belonging – and their stereotypical representations, but equally and crucially, on 'the latitude of morality' *within* and *among* nations, which reinforces symbolic and material boundaries. In the 'war against the invisible enemy', what increasingly counts is not the personal responsibility of individuals to prevent contagion, but rather the personal responsibility of European Union (EU) member states for failing to 'be ready' to face the pandemic and their respective national/collective responses to the measures taken to control it. This in turn generates a series of ironic, but not surprising, turns.

International media coverage does not seem to display a particularly judgemental attitude towards the soft approach taken by the Swedish government to tackle the emergency, for instance; after all, 'Swedes appear to be following such [social distancing] guidelines without the need for legislation' (*Bloomberg*, 19 April)[6] – the overall high death toll does not really count, as it were. By the same token, it is argued without hesitation that 'the "Swedish model" could not be exported to countries such as Spain or Turkey' (*The Guardian*, 21 April),[7] while Greece's promptness and efficiency in tackling the Covid-19 crisis elicited international praise, but also surprise (*Bloomberg*, 10 April).[8]

Meanwhile, expressions of concern and solidarity towards nations such as Italy and Spain, which are paying the highest price in Europe in terms of deaths, are not lacking among the general public; yet the boundaries between solidarity and surveillance among EU member states keep moving. Indeed, banal and convenient tropes of accusation and derision come back to the fore, together with the North-South divide, rendering the 'invisible enemy' within the EU increasingly visible. Justifying his opposition to coronabonds as financial instruments to tackle the Covid-19-derived financial crisis, the Dutch finance minister says: 'some eurozone member states [have] failed to get their houses in order ahead of the pandemic'[9] (*The Guardian*, 31 March).

A more recent article in the German press entitled '*Frau Merkel, bleiben Sie standhaft!*' ('Mrs Merkel, stand firm!') (*Die Welt*, 8 April) has once again sparked outrage among Italian politicians and Italians; by prompting the German chancellor to stand firm in her opposition to common eurozone bonds, it reintroduces the Mafia as Italy's and Italians' 'original sin'; the argument goes that in Italy, the Mafia is just waiting on a new windfall of EU cash ('*In Italien wartet die Mafia nur auf einen neuen Geldregen aus Brüssel*') and, through a smooth subject shift, it adds that 'of course Italians must be controlled by Brussels and use the funds in accordance with the rules' ('*Und natürlich müssen die Italiener von Brüssel auch kontrolliert werden und nachweisen, dass sie die Gelder ordnungsgemäß verwenden*').[10]

The judgemental attitude dominantly applied in Europe throughout the Greek financial crisis (Herzfeld 2015) is likely to be replicated in the Corona-virus crisis, as much as a financially inspired, but morally loaded, surveillance. Based on the respective health infrastructures of each nation state and their efficiency and inefficiency in tackling the emergency, the power imbalances among them are brought back to the fore: a long-lasting wound that the war against the 'invisible enemy' is reopening, ultimately turning the 'invisible enemy' within the EU into the usual suspects. Time will tell as to the wider implications of the epidemic beyond national death counts and geopolitical relations. What we already see is how Covid-19 is stirring old and rapidly renewed cultural prejudices, ultimately provoking a veritable epidemic of contingent racism on multiple levels. Their effect, however, is all but contingent, and is likely to accompany us far beyond the Covid-19 crisis. ●

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