



Editorial: COVID-19 in the tropics

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In addition to the usual mix of regular articles and book reviews, this issue of the *SJTG* publishes the latest in the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* Lecture Series, with an article by Kerrylee Rogers (2021) and subsequent commentaries and author reply, examining the response of mangroves to sea-level rise. Tidally influenced tropical environments and their 'emergent vulnerabilities' (Bernzen *et al.*, 2021: 197) are also the focus of a Special Section below, focused on livelihoods in Southeast and South Asian deltas.

This issue also contains a Review Forum dedicated to Sara E Davies' (2019) book *Containing Contagion: The Politics of Disease Outbreaks in Southeast Asia*. As Carl Grundy-Warr (2021: 346) notes in the introduction to the Review Forum, the reviews (and a response by Sara E. Davies) were written:

at a time of global pandemic (COVID-19), when procedures, practices, norms, and forms of regional and subregional action to report and contain the spread of highly infectious disease are being critically challenged.

As this issue of the *SJTG* goes to press, Brazil overtook the United States in the grim statistic of having the most deaths from COVID-19 (hereafter Covid). At the same time, the devastating acceleration of the pandemic in India is making headlines. In an earlier wave, Guayaquil in Ecuador became the worst place in Latin America for Covid deaths. So, has Covid hit hardest in the tropics? In fact, the epidemiology has little correlation with latitude. Temperature and humidity seem to be less significant than other variables (Mecenas, 2020). So far, the countries with the highest recorded per capita death rate are in temperate zones. According to data assembled by Johns Hopkins University, Hungary suffered the worst per capita loss, with 278 deaths per 100 000 people (Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). Some way below the dreadful statistic from Hungary are a cluster of countries where the death rate per capita is between 150 and 200 per 100 000 people: Italy, Brazil, Peru, Poland, United States, Mexico and France. It is likely that variations in attributing causes of death and data collection mean that the small differences between these countries may be more apparent than real. Moreover, Covid disrupts some long-held associations of the tropics with disease. Such an association was part of the discourse of tropicality, that a series of papers in the *SJTG* have critiqued (e.g. Driver, 2004; Endfield & Nash, 2007), whereby climate, 'race' and colonial discourses intersected, so that:

the tropics as a whole were seen as constituting an impoverished and pestilential region, largely unsuited to white settlement and agriculture, and yet reliant upon outside agency for prospects of development (Arnold, 2000: 6).

Writing in another journal dedicated 'to the variety and interrelatedness of nature, culture, and society in the Tropics' (eTropic, 2021), Dan Clayton proposes that, along

with climate change, Covid sees an incursion of the kinds of excess and danger long associated with tropicality into temperate zones, asking:

What happens, as seems to be the case today, when the temperate/tropical oppositions around which tropicality revolves start to unravel because the aberrations and excesses (here of epidemic disease and extreme weather) hitherto deemed to belong to tropical areas, and constative of their otherness, are found in temperate ones? (Clayton, 2021: 54).

Supplementing the agendas of decolonial tropical geographies signalled in the last issue of the *SJTG* (Sidaway *et al.*, 2021) and within our commitment to publish scholarship on tropical environments, localities and their connections, the *SJTG* invites submissions addressing the questions that Clayton poses and their attendant environmental, social, cultural, economic and political geographies.

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