

**Fragments  
for  
an  
Antifascist  
Newsletter  
#2**



Our second newsletter follows on 2 years and more from the first publication in this series: 'Fragments for an Ant-Fascist Newsletter', which we produced in response to an open call for contributions to the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest #11. Completed at the end of February 2020, on the cusp of the global Covid-19 Pandemic, the publication took shape when a small group of Five Years members began experimenting with processes of editorial assemblage, foregrounding testimonial and compressed, elliptical accounts of personal experience. Through an incipient praxis in common, we aimed to interrogate fascism and its socio-political genealogies, tracing its occult persistence in the governments and political structures of the West. Our hope is that this work will help to articulate modes of personal resistance, enunciating a struggle which is played out both within the micro-political, psychological dimension and in the arena of social relations or political oppression.

Almost exactly a month after publication the UK was in lockdown, and the subsequent development of this project became slow and fitful. So, after an extended break, we present our continued research in the same spirit, but with the focus on a single, more extended text. Esi Eshun's 'A Fever Dream' unfolds directly from an intensely embodied account of self-isolation. Written during the first wave of the Pandemic, the text opens out onto the biopolitical as the writer grapples with the virus as a kind of malevolent and mutable floating signifier. The motif of the dream plays out on a number of levels: there is a dreamlike experiential and semantic drift as this "fictive space between reality and the seemingly more fantastical variant we're living through" is traversed. But dreaming's archaic function as prophecy or portent is also urgently invoked, in particular with respect to the consequences of the Covid crisis for the environment and in relation to racial justice.

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November, 2022

A Fever Dream was expanded from notes written during the first three weeks of the pandemic. In attempting to articulate some of the violent social and political undercurrents present on the global stage before the pandemic brought them squarely to the surface, it deliberately omitted many of the other crises that exploded shortly afterwards, allowing their presences to announce themselves in spectral form, as intimations of events yet to be fully realised.

In many ways, the multifaceted global storm we're currently experiencing - the continuing eruption of wars, civil injustices, economic turmoil and environmental disaster - is an expression of those same forces, of events not caused by the pandemic, but in some ways, intensified by it.

And while in many minds, the pandemic has been officially consigned to history, it lives on both as a daily reality and as a signifier of these other forms of contagion. In that regard, this essay serves as an artefactual reminder of a time that needs no such form of commemoration. Just as the virus remains virulent and free to roam, so the concurrent crises evolve with ever greater momentum.

If the pandemic serves as a metaphor for the rise of violence and intolerances around the world, it's worth remembering that it's not over yet and that the need for vigilance and considered forms of opposition against the escalation of these other phenomena must become an ever more insistent and sustained task.

Esi Eshun, Nov, 2022





*Herd Immunity  
was Imposed on  
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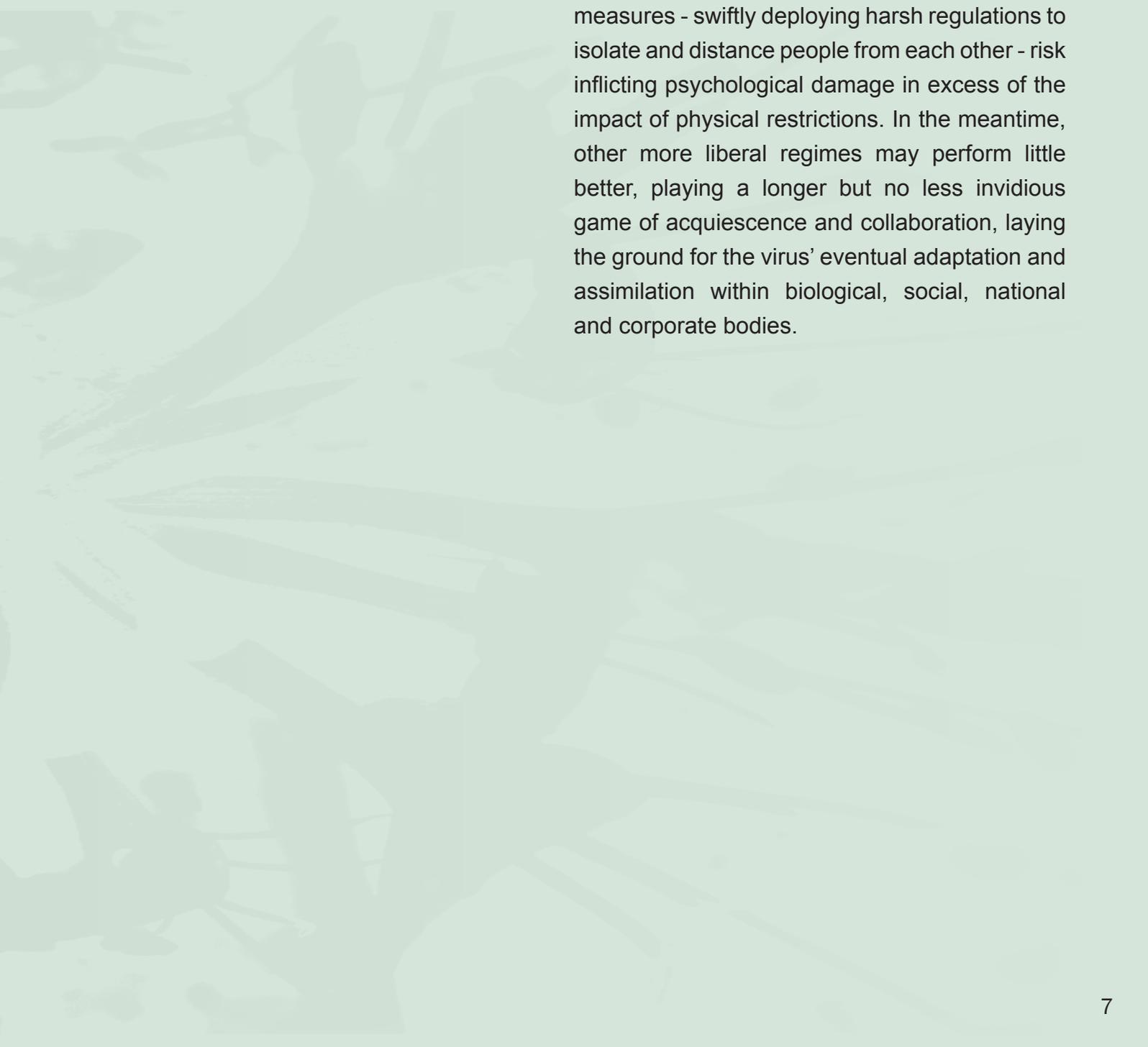
*3 July*

## A Fever Dream

by Esi Eshun

Viruses have a uniquely intimate relationship with their host bodies. Without a nucleus of their own, they embed themselves in host cells, using the other's proteins to merge, replicate, transport and mutate, forming symbiotic unions that may be parasitic or more benignly commensal in form. At times, they may trigger an immune response in their host, activating physiological and psychological behaviour changes in concert. Like the poster boy of microbial influencers, the bacteria *toxoplasma gondii* which induces reckless behaviours in mice, so viruses would seem able to manipulate others for their own ends.

For SARS-CoV-2 as for all other microorganisms, these ends, we can safely assume, revolve around the proliferation and survival of the species, with human beings corralled into service on both biological and sociological levels. In the struggle for primacy that ensues, the full force of the virus' necropower, its ability to reorganise life on the basis of death, becomes apparent. As states marshal powers to keep it at bay, so it manages to transform the tenor of those societies, holding entire populations to ransom beneath multiple, often simultaneous threats of violence, compelling high levels of existential insecurity in the mix.



Certainly, as they seek to remove or resist the microbial insurgency, authorities often end up replicating aspects of its behaviour, exerting overt or covert forms of domination on their populations. That the disease thrives on stressed and weakened bodies living in close proximity, is a given. But authorities that impose autocratic measures - swiftly deploying harsh regulations to isolate and distance people from each other - risk inflicting psychological damage in excess of the impact of physical restrictions. In the meantime, other more liberal regimes may perform little better, playing a longer but no less invidious game of acquiescence and collaboration, laying the ground for the virus' eventual adaptation and assimilation within biological, social, national and corporate bodies.

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## Origins

If, for a moment, however, we were to further speculate on the fictive space between reality and the seemingly more fantastical variant we're living through, we'd find it crowded with spectres of the dead and the not yet dead, the terror of contagion and the blast of Malthusian apocalypse. In this space, formed from the cognitive and affective gaps generated in the absence of official origin and end-point narratives, the metaphor of the world dictator might slip easily alongside seemingly far fetched tales of bats, pangolins, 5G masts, Wuhan virology labs, and sinister plans to engineer HIV-hybrid bioweapons as part of a Sino imperialist take over plot.

And yet, among this lurid hotch potch of conspiracy and espionage theories, one narrative seems to have gained ground among sectors of the environmental and scientific communities. Attesting to heightened states of bodily, border, economic and environmental insecurities beneath the cracked surface of globalisation, it suggests that the rise in zoonotic diseases such as Covid-19, is in large part coterminous with a neoliberal hegemony that counts the trashing of the environment among its many ills. The spread of viruses from animals to humans stems in large part, it seems, from encroachment on wild habitats, as farmers or poachers in the Global South, unable to compete in international free markets bolster their livelihoods by entering into or expanding their trade in wild animals.

Of course, such displacements are not confined to the animal world. Forced, in many cases, by economic, environmental and political instabilities to risk their lives to cross to the North, migrants, more often than not, find themselves at the mercy of countries vying to exclude them. Against this background, the virus - in all its perceived wildness and unconstrained, transgressive otherness - becomes for some people, the magnifier of barely contained fears of invasion, contamination and non assimilation threatening to overwhelm already precarious social, cultural and racial norms.

Hardly surprising then, that its dramatic arrival, cutting a swathe through territorial borders, provides additional legitimation for stronger controls, and for the intensification of already febrile expressions of nationalisms and racism. It provides the rationale for the imposition and extension of states of emergency and exception, and for increased levels of biopolitical control of bodies in both digital and real spaces, accelerating the expansion of a network of apparatuses designed to monitor the geographic and demographic spread of the disease. The ensuing bio/ pharma/ military/ technological complex, converging corporate, with bio and national security interests, plays heavily into notions of espionage, domination and war.

Of this kind of assemblage, the UK government's proposed Joint National Biosecurity Centre - intended to advise on viral threat levels - provides just one example. With the organisation to be modelled on the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, and with the former director of resilience and strategy at the National Cyber Security Centre lined up as its head - the implied relationship between Covid and the risk to national security is easy to draw.

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# Duality

As the numbers of Covid cases continue to rise, its repressive rule creates multiple logjams and breakdowns in normal circuits of activity. In numerous ways, it canalises the movement of bodies into spaces of confinement and containment. On a biological level, it restricts respiration, obstructing the flow of oxygen around the body, coagulating the blood, inducing clots to form in lungs, heart or brain, further impeding the transport of breath and blood around tissues. On a societal level, as governments declare mass lockdowns, it causes vehicle use to plummet and the spread of emissions to fall sharply, unexpectedly enabling clean air to return and allowing wildlife - suddenly free from human interference - to flourish.

As this last sequence of events shows however, with each restrictive act, an almost simultaneous countervailing force comes into being, directed, this time, towards healing, care, and the resolving of structural inequities. Strikingly, over the first few months of the crisis, these contradictions seem to hold the promise that sooner or later, the chaos will give way to better things. It's a dynamic that can be observed in the way the UK government responds to the emergency by closing down much of the economy, only to pour billions in liquidity into it - in the process, comprehensively demolishing the austerity rule book that has both dominated the party's thinking since the 2008 banking crisis and that has resulted in an NHS so underfunded that it lacks the capacity to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

and I do not believe that one can come up with a single account of these most recent forms of public demonstrations and occupations that link them more broadly to the history and principle of

let people  
when he  
manager

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sovereign who explicitly decides and enforces the question of who will live and who will die.<sup>6</sup> And Achille Mbembe has elaborated upon this distinction with his conception of "necropolitics."

And this was, for some of us, keenly exemplified at that meeting of the Tea Party in the United States in which Congressman Ron Paul suggested that those who have serious illness and cannot pay for health insurance, or "choose" not to pay, as he would put it, would simply have to die. A shout of joy rippled through the crowd, according to published reports. It was, I conjecture, the kind of joyous shout that usually accompanies going to war or forms of nationalist fervor. But if this was for some a joyous occasion, it must have been fueled by a belief that those who do not make sufficient wages or who are not in secure enough employment do not deserve to be covered by health care, and a belief that none of the rest of us are responsible for those people. The implication was clearly that those who are not able to achieve jobs with health care belong to a population that deserves to die and that is finally responsible for their own death.

Shocking for many people who still live under the nominal framework of social democracy is the underlying presumption that individuals ought to care only for themselves, and not for others, and that health care is not a public good, but a commodity. In this same speech, Paul praises the traditional function of the church and charity for taking care of the needy. Although some Christian-left alternatives to this situation have emerged in Europe and elsewhere to make sure that those abandoned by forms of social welfare are taken care of by philanthropic or communitarian practices of "care," those alternatives often supplement and support the decimation of public services such as health care. In other words, they accept the new role for Christian ethics and practices

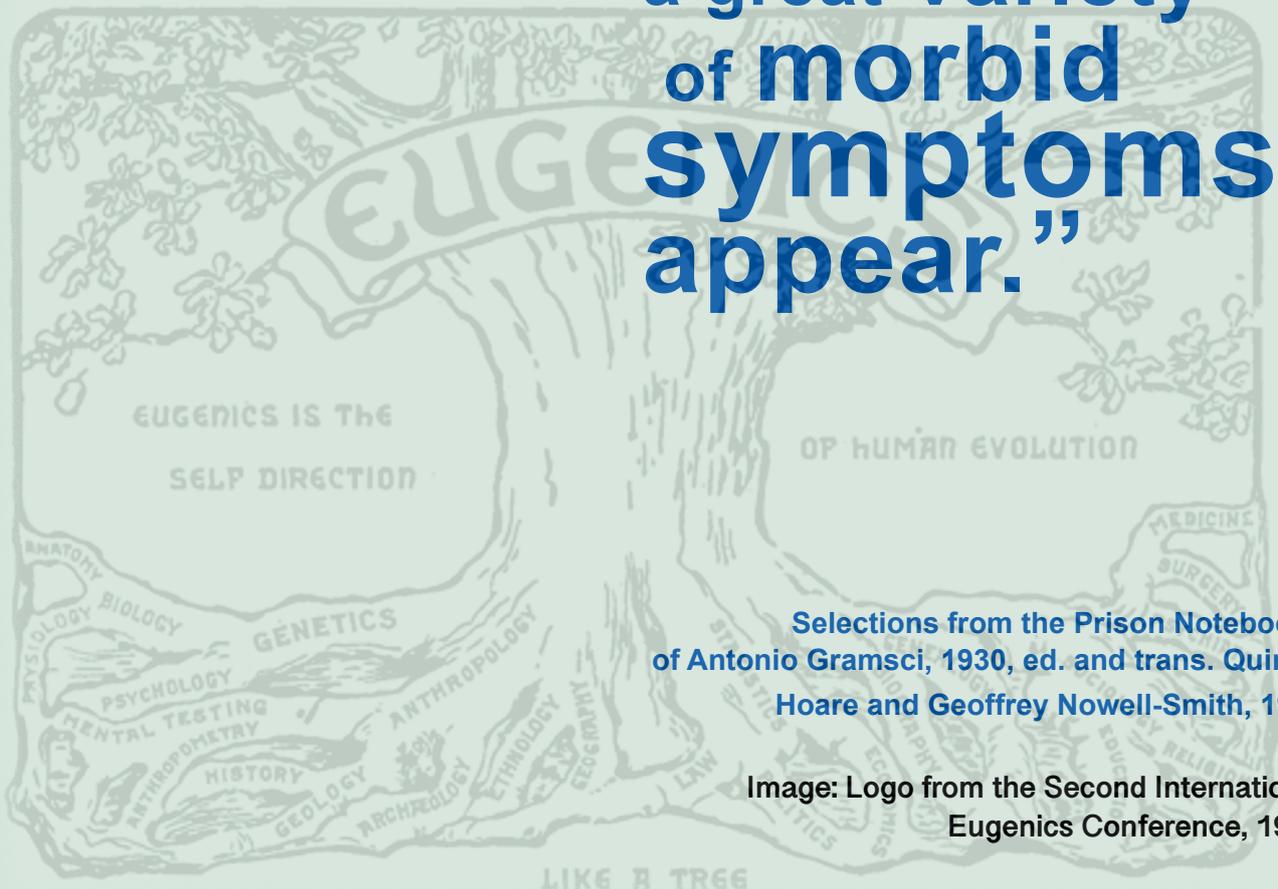
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# “The crisis

consists precisely  
in the fact  
that the old is  
dying and the  
new cannot be  
born; in this  
interregnum,  
a great variety  
of morbid  
symptoms  
appear.”



Selections from the Prison Notebooks  
of Antonio Gramsci, 1930, ed. and trans. Quintin  
Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 1971

Image: Logo from the Second International  
Eugenics Conference, 1921

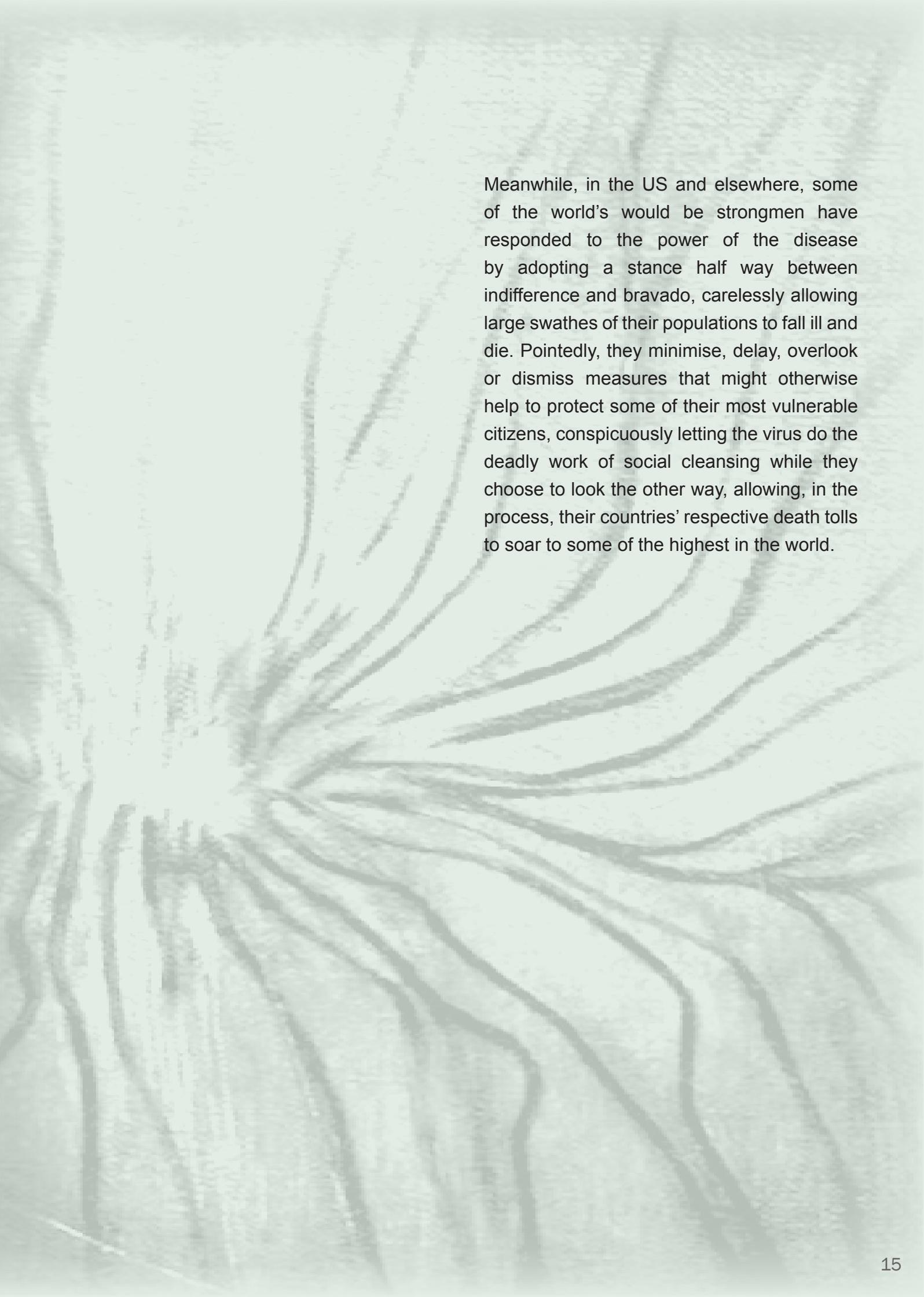
Meanwhile, as businesses, schools and shops are ordered to close their gates and workflows enter the home space, the propulsion towards alternative means of connectivity grows. The flattened depth of field and diminished telematic possibilities of Zoom and other conferencing platforms, allows for a facsimile of intimacy, enabling some measure of affectivity to flow between distanced peoples.

In the initial febrile atmosphere of the pandemic, NHS workers and then key workers in general suddenly became national heroes. Among these newly elevated groups of society, members of traditionally undervalued sectors - cleaners, delivery drivers, supermarket attendants, social care workers - unexpectedly find themselves exemplars of the most demanding and self sacrificing of moral and economic imperatives. And as the government's mantra that we're all in this together is repeated to near ad nauseam, the public responds to the new social and economic challenges with a level of grave solicitousness and sense of shared responsibility.

As reports grow of spontaneous acts of kindness and increased examples of neighbourliness and community mindedness among strangers, it seems as if, for a few astonishing weeks, Fredric Jameson's famous dictum, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, might partly have been given the lie, and that the type of socialist moment that many could only have dreamed of, might finally be coming to pass.

And then the curtains begin to lift. In the strangely altered time frame of Covid-19, in which two months are compressed into two weeks or less, it slowly becomes clear that lurking behind the government's rhetoric are repeated errors of judgement, leading the administration to fail time and again in its basic duty of care to some of those same frontline workers whose praises they have enjoined us to sing.

Similarly, news filters in that the death toll in care homes is far higher than might be anticipated; the number of excess deaths revealing at best the government's unwitting disregard for the safety of people working and cared for within the system, and at worst, a wilful neglect of them. And as it emerges that BAME deaths have accounted for nearly half of all Covid deaths, despite making up less than 14 % of the population, it becomes clear that like most dictators, the virus is ethnically discriminatory, and that the government has not been exercised enough by the disparity in mortality rates to attempt to improve upon it.



Meanwhile, in the US and elsewhere, some of the world's would be strongmen have responded to the power of the disease by adopting a stance half way between indifference and bravado, carelessly allowing large swathes of their populations to fall ill and die. Pointedly, they minimise, delay, overlook or dismiss measures that might otherwise help to protect some of their most vulnerable citizens, conspicuously letting the virus do the deadly work of social cleansing while they choose to look the other way, allowing, in the process, their countries' respective death tolls to soar to some of the highest in the world.



# Predictions

For some time now, reports have circulated about the long term effects of Covid-19, which, even after mild infections, range from severe shortness of breath, to extreme fatigue, loneliness, depression and neurological deficits such as brain fog. To some extent, the disease affects a person's ability to reinsert themselves into their social spheres. Similarly, it reduces their productive potential, rendering them unsuited to the discipline of regular work, diminishing their capacity to slot smoothly back into the neoliberal economosphere. Against this background, we can speculate that in the absence of vaccines, as countries struggle to deal with mass business collapses, escalating unemployment rates and unprecedented levels of welfare uptake, companies might soon start to differentiate employees on the basis of their Covid profile, demanding the right to know their status by scanning monitoring forms, social media accounts and third party data for insights into likely prognoses. Invariably, it will be the people most susceptible to the disease - from BAME backgrounds, on low incomes, or with preexisting medical conditions - who will stand to lose the most from the process. In the meantime, others will rush to declare their resistance to the virus by cramming their social media pages with images of exercise and clean eating in a variety of pristine settings. Still others will film themselves ostentatiously flouting social distancing rules, while yet more will brandish pharmacological or technological aids to health, in opposition to those who loudly insist that they need no such help to stay alive.

In this environment, where the currency of health equates to wealth, how soon before clean breathing itself becomes a currency of a kind, and undue close breathing becomes, on the part of some people, a daringly transgressive act, while for others, it assumes the status of a crime, becoming tantamount to a type of terrorism formed from the convergence of notions of bio security, national security and social security within the bodies of multiply-marginalised peoples.

Meanwhile, as the planet regains its own ability to breathe, the purification of the atmosphere and the environment as a whole might become pillars upon which economic viability might be built. Certainly, Covid-19 can be conceived as an invasive force that carries with it the capacity to destroy large swathes of the economic and social order as we know them. But it is also an opportunity to transform these structures in more equitable ways. Whether governments, or more importantly, the public at large, will seize the opportunity to make such changes, remains, for the present at least, an open question.

