

“Living with...”: From the COVID-19 Pandemic to the Climate Crisis
An international workshop on the emergence of risk normality

5 – 8 July 2021

Concept Note

The COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the free and liberal social environment we were used to. Imposed social distancing and the need to wear masks, coupled with quarantines, the globalization of the virus, and the realization that there is no place where one may escape its grip, have turned life in 2020 into a strange and somewhat apocalyptic experience. For many, these strange times are deeply unsettling. With no vaccine thus far, it seems that all policies have converged into one general guideline: We have to learn to live with the virus. We have to adapt our daily routines to a world in which the risk of COVID-19 is omnipresent. What exactly does this adaptation entail? Each country has provided different answers to this question, but they all boil down to the realization that living with the risk of COVID-19 means restricting our routines in all aspects of our lives.

However, the challenges that COVID-19 poses to life in 2020 are not new. In fact, it is possible to understand the COVID-19 episode as a test case of a new governmental paradigm for living under new sets of global hazards. However, the challenges that COVID-19 poses to life in 2020 merely exemplify those posed by a much greater crisis: climate change.

The climate crisis is changing the planet and, more significantly for us, the human habitat. A changing habitat requires new adaptations: The climate crisis calls for new ways of “living with.” Human beings need to learn to live in a world in which temperatures are ever rising and fires erupt that melt the permafrost in Siberia and burn the forests of Australia and California. We need to learn to live in a world in which there are ever-fewer species and biological diversity is constantly decreasing. People need to learn to live in a world with the hazards of coastal flooding or hellish fires. In a world in which new health hazards lurk as a result of climate change, people need to learn how to live in a strange and unexpected environment. Does living with the virus have the same implications for inhabitants of the global south and those of the west?

What is the meaning of “living with”? Surely, the answer includes most aspects of life, such as workplace, family, leisure, career, politics, science, theology, and individuality. Lakoff and Collier refer to this question as an ethical question underlying “regimes of living”: “a tentative, and situated configuration of normative,

technical and political elements that are brought into alignment in situations that present ethical problems – that is, situations in which the question of how to live is at stake” (Lakoff and Collier 2007: 23).

In this workshop we draw upon this understanding of the regime of life and wish to focus mostly on how changing perceptions of health and public health—following the COVID-19 and climate change crises—impact our lives, ethics, and sense of normality. Three main health-related elements can be associated with this new mode of living.

- (a) Preparedness: As the unexpected future becomes routine, preparing for natural disasters, pandemics, or even biological warfare has become the order of the day. Preparedness as a modality of governmentality involves a gamut of techniques, the science of risks, and theorizing and revising concepts such as resilience, security, and public health. Preparedness means living under the constant threat of emergency and as such has significant implications for our sense of individuality, freedom, and privacy.
- (b) What is “healthy”? Whereas medical anthropology has always challenged the concepts of health, disease, and sickness for being relative and unstable (Kleinman 1995), this criticism has remained mainly at the individual level, referring to the shaky ground upon which these concepts are attributed to persons. With COVID-19 and a series of pandemics and natural hazards, it seems more and more evident that these concepts are on shaky ground also with regard to public health. Just as individuals learn to live with a chronic condition that renders them neither healthy nor sick, so contemporary risks and hazards lead to the conclusion that living with a condition—be it a polluted planet, rising sea levels, or unexpected pandemics—has become a hallmark of public health as well.
- (c) New modes of subjectivities: Learning to live with a global health condition and with the imperative of being prepared calls for new interrelations between individuals, society, and the state. The liberal subject, whose freedom and autonomy are aligned with a personal sense of responsibility, needs to rethink responsibility in relation to distant others, to society in general, and to global dispositions. What is the new subjectivity to replace the hitherto hegemonic liberal subjectivity and how does chronic global illness (or global chronic health) affect self-image and social imagination?

We see these changes, taken together, as the emergence of a new normality, a normality of risks. This normality is the puzzle we want to tackle in our workshop.

- What does this normality entail? In what ways does it resemble the 20th century risk society and in what ways does it entail something new?
- How is preparedness enacted on a global scale, and what can we learn from the experience of different societies with tackling COVID-19?
- What does chronic global health mean?
- Can we understand this shaky normality as being connected with the world that climate change is bringing about?
- What are the challenges that such menaces pose to liberal democracies and the role of science and experts?

These are only a few of the questions we are interested in. We are not interested in unequivocal answers but rather in theoretical deliberations and empirical research into these questions that will provide a rich and comparative perspective. The workshop will host senior scholars and experts from public health, medical anthropology and the humanities to deliver master classes and discuss participants' personal works. We invite researchers (PhD candidates and postdoc fellows) to submit their candidacy as participants in an international workshop that will delve into the different meanings of living with collective and constant danger.

The workshop will be held in Jerusalem, Israel, in 5-8 July 2021. It is a collaboration of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, the Edelstein Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Sciences and Ideas at Tel Aviv University.

We are interested in interdisciplinary discussions and call for researchers from diverse fields of knowledge, such as the social sciences, health sciences, law, environmental sciences, and the humanities—including geography, history, philosophy, cultural studies and ethics.

Participating Scholars:

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- [Prof. Eva Horn](#), Department of German Studies, University of Vienna
- [Prof. Andrew Lakoff](#), College of Letters, Art and Science, University of Southern California (USC)
- [Dr. Limor Samimian Darash](#), Federman School of Public Policy, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- [Prof. Monica Schoch-Spana](#), Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University
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- Prof. Andrew Lakoff, College of Letters, Art and Science, USC University of Southern California
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