

Personal Reflection on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Portuguese and Spanish conquest of the Americas rested on taking over countries which had already been inhabited by Natives for thousands of years. Europeans brought many weapons with them to the Americas, and the most destructive weapon in their power was disease. The disease was so damaging to the Native population because they had no immunity due to living isolated from others (Teofilo Ruiz, Lecture April 11, 2018). The conquest changed the path of history and the lives of the Native population with the introduction of new diseases creating pandemics such as yellow fever, smallpox, and measles (Teofilo Ruiz, "Spanish Society 1348-1700," p.124). These diseases caused enormous devastation by killing entire populations of Natives. Even those who survived had their land taken away and were forced to assimilate into a new culture. Simultaneously, Natives' cultures, languages, and customs were either dehumanized or destroyed. It has been 520 years since the Americas were discovered, during which diseases have changed the course of history for those living here. Now, the world is facing another pandemic that will similarly irreversibly change societies and people worldwide.

Pandemics of new diseases have emerged throughout history, causing the distress, apprehension, fear, and killing of millions of people. I have witnessed a few pandemics, such as HIV, H1N1, SARS, Ebola, and Zika. However, it never crossed my mind that the entire world would be experiencing something to the magnitude and devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic. For me, as a mother, daughter, wife, sister, friend, and citizen, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an enormous amount of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety on multiple levels. Witnessing two countries that I love going through enormous devastation and dealing with a lack of presidential leadership is even more stressful. Living in a different country away from my family

during this pandemic is scary and challenging. One of my biggest fears is if my parents and brothers get sick or something terrible happens, and I am not there with them, or I cannot make it in time to say goodbye. Therefore, this pandemic has exacerbated my fears and anxiety of having my elderly and vulnerable parents living away in the countryside of Sao Paulo. At the same time, these fears are intensified by witnessing how irresponsibly the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro is handling the pandemic. For example, he is dangerously asking people to go back to work, although the virus has not yet reached its peak. In general, the health care system in Brazil does not have the infrastructure to handle this pandemic due to their lack of respirators and personal protective equipment. Specific to my parents, the thought of hospitals located in the countryside where they may only have one or two respirators is frightening. Since my father is 86 years old, and my mother is 75 years old, these fears are overwhelming. It feels like the parent and children dynamic is reversed after a certain age; I am constantly worried, calling, and explaining to my parents that they cannot leave their house. A family FaceTime intervention was needed to explain the severity of the situation and to assist them in buying their groceries online to make sure they stay home. My brother is an ER doctor and is in Brazil's frontlines, which is another enormous source of fear and worry. He has expressed his concerns and how devastating this pandemic is, and although he is an emotionally strong person, I can see how the pandemic is affecting him.

Additionally, before the pandemic started, my whole family was going to come to the U.S. to watch my UCLA graduation this spring and to spend one month with us. It has been my father's biggest motivation to make sure he is healthy enough to travel to the U.S. and witness his youngest daughter and the last one in the family to graduate from college. He is my biggest

inspiration, my biggest supporter, and cheerleader. Unfortunately, all of their plans were canceled, and what hurts the most is the uncertainty of when I will be able to see them again. Furthermore, there is the fear of my husband or me getting sick and not being able to take care of our children or my parents getting sick. Truthfully, I cannot remember the last time I got a good night's rest since this pandemic started.

About four years ago, I was diagnosed with Lupus, which is an auto-immune disease where the body attacks itself. They haven't found a cure, but it can be managed with the right treatment and daily medication. Having this auto-immune disease during a pandemic adds another source of fear and anxiety; the lack of sleep and stress can be detrimental while trying to maintain a strong immune system. In order to manage the disease, taking a medication called Hydroxychloroquine daily is required. This medication is crucial for millions of people who struggle with auto-immune diseases and rely exclusively on it in order to function daily. One morning while having breakfast and watching the president's press briefing, I heard him announce that there was a promising medication called Hydroxychloroquine that could potentially treat the COVID-19 virus. However, his statement was not based on any scientific evidence. Nevertheless, out of fear, people ran to their doctors asking for a prescription, which caused a shortage of medication, and patients could not refill their prescriptions. This impacted millions of people who are in a high-risk group. Without the medication, a flare up from the disease is almost inevitable, which can put me in bed for a couple of weeks or a few months. Due to the president spreading misinformation about Hydroxychloroquine, it is extremely difficult to refill my prescription. I am certain many at-risk people are going through similar situations due

to the short supply.

The combination of being a mother, a student learning remotely, and assisting my children through their remote learning has been challenging. The motivation for learning in children and adults is not the same when done remotely. Remote learning for children is even more challenging because they no longer have the routine and the structure that school gives them. Their activities have been canceled, and it is hard for children to process what is going on, to accept that they cannot see their friends or leave the house. Between studying for my own four classes and my typical housework, I still need to attend to them to make sure they are staying on track. Recently, I have so much on my plate that I feel that I am not giving one hundred percent at anything. Rather, it feels like I am just trying to keep it all together to the best of my ability. Additionally, it is hard to see the economic stress my husband is going through during this pandemic as his business has decreased tremendously, he has lost clients, and the future of his business is uncertain. He is trying to keep his longtime staff employed and working from home because they have families and children to support. However, we do not know for how long he can sustain our livelihood. At the same time, for thousands of people who are graduating during this terrible economic downfall with the hope of getting a job, career prospects do not look promising. Therefore, my plans for graduate school may have to be put on hold.

At the same time, there is some good that has come out of this pandemic. This time has allowed me to be with my children at home, parenting them more, and teaching them something meaningful and profound. I have been teaching them that our actions and choices have tremendous impacts on others, and it is vital for each of us to do our part because we can make a

difference. This made my family reflect and realize that we need each other more than ever. It has taught us that we are all connected, and our choices can have a positive or negative consequence. On Mother's Day, when I was sitting outside in the sun talking to my girls, they said their favorite part of quarantine was, that they liked being together in the house, not having to go anywhere, and enjoying doing simple things. It made me realize what is important and, unfortunately, often forgotten, but beautifully pointed out by my girls. They reminded me that I am always running around, taking them from activity to activity, and that we should remember to slow down and connect with each other more often. This pandemic made us see more clearly and realize that changes are needed. It has helped me realize that we should focus on being more of a human being and less of a human doing. Some friends have shared similar sentiments that while they are in quarantine, their children are happy, and siblings are getting closer to each other. However, I realize that being happy at home is not a reality for many children who are suffering and witnessing violence, and physical and emotional abuse.

This pandemic has revealed to me a lot about who people really are, and it has put some tension on friendships that were already strained from sharing different political views. Observing how some friends are approaching the pandemic has been an eye-opening experience and, in fact, sometimes hard to overlook. When they downplay the virus as a common cold, choose to ignore physical distancing, and/or allow their children to have a playdate during the lockdown, it shockingly reveals their actual values and priorities. Universally, it is our responsibility to have compassion, respect, and solidarity and to come together in challenging times of enormous physical, emotional, and financial suffering. It has been hard to witness

people putting their lives on the line to save others and to watch the pain and suffering of families who are not allowed to be with their loved ones when they are passing. The impacts on mental health from this pandemic will be tragic on families, doctors, and nurses. Not to mention the economic impact, as families are desperate and have lost their jobs. Also, the pandemic has revived social and racial injustices, and disparities as African Americans and Latinos have been disproportionately affected and have died in greater numbers from the virus.

This pandemic has historically impacted the world, society, and has had personal effects on all of us. As we move forward, the future is uncertain, as cities and states start to open up, and they are losing their social distancing restrictions. There is a fear of a second wave, and for people like me in the high-risk group, life will not be the same until a treatment or a vaccine becomes available. However, I hope that something positive will come out of all of this suffering, by electing better leaders who create a more just society, or becoming a more empathetic and connected community. Learning new perspectives and having deeper outlooks on what is fundamentally important in life. I am looking forward to the day where all this suffering is passed, I can reunite with my loved ones, fly to Brazil without putting my family and me in danger, see my friends, and we are all able to hug and kiss one another.

Works Cited

Ruiz, Teofilo F. *Spanish Society 1348-1700*. second ed., Taylor & Francis, 2017.

