



## Staying with the Crisis: A Feminist Politics of Care for Living with an Infected Planet

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**Abstract.** This essay is written in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Proposing to stay with the crisis, this essay starts from the centrality of care under the pandemic conditions. Radical despair and radical hope are the entry points for analyzing the terms orienting the response to the crisis. War and care have emerged as key terms mobilizing powerful imaginaries. The efficacy of martial propaganda based on war-talk with its ideology of death poses a threat. Care, in particular care feminism, rooted in the ontological vulnerability of life and the recognition of the interconnectedness of the ties that bind us, inspires possibilities to imagining care taking and healing as a way of continued living with an infected planet. The infected planet refers to the current pandemic and to the much older disease of colonial racist patriarchy. Care feminism counteracts capitalist destruction and toxic human exceptionalism. Rooted in mutual interdependence and pandemic solidarity, care feminism presents a hopeful perspective for collaborative survival.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, infected planet, staying with the crisis, capitalism, war, care, feminism.

### [es] Soportar la crisis: una política feminista de cuidados para vivir con un planeta infectado

**Resumen.** Este ensayo está escrito en respuesta al brote de COVID-19. Proponiendo soportar la crisis, este ensayo parte de la centralidad de la atención en las condiciones de la pandemia. La desesperación y la esperanza radicales son los puntos de entrada para analizar los términos que orientan la respuesta a la crisis. La guerra y el cuidado se han convertido en términos clave que movilizan poderosos imaginarios. La eficacia de la propaganda marcial basada en el discurso bélico con su ideología de muerte representa una amenaza. El cuidado, en particular el feminismo del cuidado, arraigado en la vulnerabilidad ontológica de la vida y el reconocimiento de la interconexión de los lazos que nos unen, inspira posibilidades para imaginar el cuidado y la curación como una forma de vivir de manera continua con un planeta infectado. El planeta infectado se refiere a la pandemia actual y a la enfermedad mucho más antigua del patriarcado racista colonial. El feminismo del cuidado contrarresta la destrucción capitalista y el excepcionalismo humano tóxico. Enraizado en la interdependencia mutua y la solidaridad pandémica, el feminismo del cuidado presenta una perspectiva esperanzadora para la supervivencia colaborativa.

**Palabras clave:** COVID-19; planeta infectado; soportar la crisis; capitalismo; guerra; cuidado; feminismo.

**Summary.** 1. Staying with the Crisis; 2. Respond we Must: At War with the Virus; 3. Care Feminism: Continued Living with an Infected Planet; 4. Instead of a Conclusion: No Going Back to Normal: Pandemic Solidarity for Collaborative Survival; 5. Bibliography.

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“Survival establishes the fundamental context of caring. As a species, we have no choice about engaging in caring activities”.

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher

What happens when there is the outbreak of a new deadly virus? What happens when this virus starts to spread globally? On January 30, 2020 the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the new coronavirus to be a “Public Health Emergency of international concern”<sup>2</sup>. About two weeks later, on February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization “announced a new name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19”<sup>3</sup>. Since early 2020, the global population of the infected planet has been learning as fast as possible how to live and survive with the new realities of COVID-19 times. The global population of the infected planet experiences, and witnesses, unfold in real-time the establishment of the rules, orders, and instructions of a new pandemic regime instituted by nation states across the globe. Viral realities and pandemic rules are profoundly affecting and changing all parts of life. These changes are experienced as swift and very dramatic. The corona virus has, in fact, become life-defining. The virus has an enormous impact on the organization of everyday life, on political governance, on the world economy, and on the possibilities of institutional, cultural and public life. Since its outbreak, the COVID-19 virus has almost immediately become the seemingly sole topical focus of the global news landscape. The virus dominates the reporting by national broadcasting corporations and also by the private media industry. Governments issue their pandemic rules, their instructions concerning social distancing rules and quarantine through public media. Every day the global population listens to the updates on the radio, watches the crisis unfold on television. Every day the global population receives the pandemic orders and the rules for lockdown. Facts, opinions, misinformation, and bizarre speculations abound. This includes a wide range of very differently motivated conspiracy theories put forward both by alt-right extremists and by the liberal left. These have started to circulate widely on different social media platforms.

Hashtags surfacing and trending online present a shortcut to understanding the lived pandemic realities round the world. Such new pandemic hashtags include the following: #stopspreparingthecoronavirus #washyourhands #covercoughsandsneezes #stayathome #wearamask #becalmbesafe #besafe #stayhealthy #keepadistance #socialdistancing #quarantinecare #protectothers #wereallinthis together #takecareofyourself #takecareofothers #thegreatlockdown #thegreatshutdown. Fundamentally, the survival rules of pandemic living are based on keeping safe through keeping a distance from each other. The new term coined for this survival strategy is social distancing. As humans are told to stay apart in order to stop spreading the virus, they understand their fundamental bodily vulnerability. They also understand that they are a risk to others just as much as others are a risk to them. This is the fundamental interdependence in vulnerability, risk, and care. Humans are being dependent upon each other as they are tied together by seeking to stop the contagion. The new pandemic rules define in detail the concrete realities of

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, «Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)», <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

human life, down to the most mundane aspects of the everyday. To give one such example. The pandemic rules include instructions for proper handwashing, even specifying the length of washing hands in order to protect oneself—and consequently others—from the infection with the corona virus. I want to emphasize here that these pandemic rules present a major challenge to a large part of the world's population. Washing hands might sound like a very simple thing to do. It is not. For many who do not have access to adequate hygiene infrastructure and water resources, washing hands is not a given. They cannot wash their hands properly. They cannot follow the rules to protect themselves and stay safe. Many, who work in the informal sector, cannot afford to stay at home, they cannot afford to not go out as they have to try to make their daily money. Poverty, poor drinking-water access, lack of provisions for sanitation and hygiene, hollowed out health infrastructure, and crowded living conditions, mostly experienced in informal urban settlements as well as in refugee camps, are some of the prevailing reasons that make it entirely impossible for many to follow the pandemic rules for keeping themselves and others safe. Staying at home for those threatened by domestic violence, which always increases in times of crisis, as is well known from past crisis conditions and also holds true in this crisis, renders the home an unsafe site<sup>4</sup>. Torn apart by the lived economic and social realities on the ground, these rules can only be fully followed by those whose economic and material realities make it possible for them to follow the rules. There are those who can follow the rules, and there are those who cannot follow the rules. As the virus ravages the planet, many in the global population of the planet are being made more vulnerable because of pre-existing vulnerabilities. They are at greater risk of viral exposure. They are at greater risk to suffer more after viral exposure. They are at greater risk that no tests are available for them. They are at greater risk that there are not sufficient intensive care units for them. They are at greater risk to die.<sup>5</sup> From material, economic, and infrastructural injustice follows pandemic injustice. From care injustice follows pandemic injustice. The virus does not discriminate, systems do. The dramatic inequalities that define the life of many across the globe disproportionately affect marginalized communities of poverty, communities affected by war and the aftermath of war, communities affected by climate catastrophe, communities of color, and indigenous communities. The possibilities of being able to live according to the new pandemic rules in order to take best care of oneself and of others are highly unevenly distributed. Injustice is painful. Injustice is deadly.

Crisis response to the corona virus is a question of life and death. The virus crisis lays bare entrenched global inequalities resulting in the impact of the virus highly unevenly distributed. The virus crisis makes clear that a crisis response needs to address this extreme systemic injustice that, in fact, long predates the outbreak of the virus. In medical terms a crisis is the turning point for better or for worse in

<sup>4</sup> See: World Health Organization, «COVID-19 and violence against women. What the health sector/system can do», March, 26, 2020, <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/vaw-covid-19/en/> [accessed March, 28, 2020].

<sup>5</sup> See: Sabrina Strings, S., «It's Not Obesity. It's Slavery. We know why Covid-19 is killing so many black people», *New York Times*, May 25, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/25/opinion/coronavirus-race-obesity.html> [accessed May 25, 2020.]; Mitchell, E.A., «If bitterness were a whetstone: On Grief, History, and COVID-19», *Black Perspectives*, April 23, 2020, <https://www.aaihs.org/if-bitterness-were-a-whetstone-on-grief-history-and-covid-19/> [accessed May 20, 2020]; BBC News, «Coronavirus: Risk of death is higher for ethnic minorities», *BBC News*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52889106> [accessed June 2, 2020].

an acute disease. The response that can be given to a crisis largely determines the outcome of this turning point. The current virus crisis presents a global turning point. Preparedness for crisis response is a matter of global justice. How prepared is the world for living with this virus? What are the pandemic insights for building a different preparedness? What are the lessons we are going to learn from the response to the virus crisis? What are the virus lessons for building different futures for living with an infected planet? What are the ways in which response, responsibility, and response-ability have to be connected differently in order for collective survival to become “collaborative survival”?<sup>6</sup>

This essay is a reflection on what it means to think and to write starting from the experience of living with the virus crisis, of living in a time when millions of lives are in peril, of living in a time where post-pandemic futures are, in no uncertain terms, discussed as going back to normal, with normal the crisis to begin with. In times like these, writing does not come easily. What can writing actually do in the face of more than a million of known infections and more than one hundred thousand deaths? The interest is on understanding what writing can do in times of virus crisis as an endeavor at once analytical and prospective, diagnostic and generative, reflective and political. With crisis response central to living and surviving under pandemic conditions, the focus is on the fundamental question of preparedness as well as on the central terms that orient the politics of public political address. The virus has been called the enemy. The political imaginary of war has redefined caring work as frontline work. The entanglement of war and care is crucial to understanding the politics of response to the pandemic threat. The last part of this essay develops the notion of care feminism as staying with the crisis for present and future living and surviving with the infected planet. Radical despair and radical hope inform this writing which presents a call to thought and a call to action against the systemic violence of the continuous catastrophe commonly known as normality.

## 1. Staying with the Crisis

The ancient Greek word *krisis* means quarrel, dispute, and trial. Interestingly enough, the ancient Greek word *krisis* also means decision, judgement, and determination. Language tells us things. What does the etymology of the word *krisis* have to tell us today? What does it mean that the same word means quarrel and decision, dispute and judgement, trial and determination. *Krisis* puts quarrels to the test of judgement and exposes judgement to the test of dispute. The dispute presents the judgement. The judgement presents the dispute. There is much to be learned from these semantic dimensions of *krisis* to understand better what it means to be in crisis. Judgement is always disputed, quarrels lead to decisions, determination is on trial. In today’s medical language, the crisis is defined as the decisive point. The crisis is the turning point of disease progression. Will it get better? Will it get worse? Will there be recovery? Will there be death? Crisis is decisive. We are judged by and determined by, and through, crisis.

In 2016 feminist multispecies thinker Donna Haraway has given us *Staying with*

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<sup>6</sup> Tsing, A. L., *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 2.

*the Trouble*<sup>7</sup>. Haraway has taught us that we have to take very seriously that we “live in disturbing times” and that we have to stay with the trouble of our time<sup>8</sup>. Haraway has shown us that writing as staying with the trouble presents a specific intellectual and ethical commitment to the present. “The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response”<sup>9</sup>. Early 2020, after the outbreak of the corona virus, the notion of response has taken on a whole new dimension. Crisis response has become the most important term in the current vocabulary of the acute global corona virus crisis. Crisis response is at the center of political decision making and at the center of all practical doings that seek to come to terms with the pandemic conditions. Adhering to Haraway’s suggestion of “staying with”, I consider thinking and writing in COVID times as *staying with the crisis and thinking with the virus* for living with an infected planet. As a parent, feminist academic, university educator, cultural theorist, and a person who is part of one of the so-called risk groups, I rely on the approaches of radical despair and on radical hope for staying with the crisis. In scholarly and academic terms radical despair and radical hope might appear to be strange starting points for writing an essay.<sup>10</sup> What kind of framework can be based on despair and on hope? What kind of method results from the coupling of despair and hope? I want to argue here that despair and hope come as close as possible to staying with the crisis as they represent the position of the turning point which is the position of utmost uncertainty. At the crossroads, we cannot know if things will become better or if things will become worse. We do not know yet if we are on the path to recovery and repair or on the path to death and destruction. Staying with the crisis informs the underlying feminist ethics of the research approach to analysis, diagnosis, and the responsibility of writing under the conditions of urgency, emergency, and immediacy. Staying with the crisis also means that my cultural theoretical approach constitutes the subject of analysis and diagnosis through hours and hours of reading and listening to international reporting on the crisis response and on COVID realities. Time for dedicated research, reflection, and analysis is not easily found in times of crisis. As a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, I do my very best to make time for research, reflection, and writing despite the growing everyday responsibilities of emergent institutional COVID-19 tasks and COVID-19 care taking responsibilities as I learn that meeting and organizing remotely takes at least twice as much time and energy than working together with others in person. An educational institution in remote mode is an institution that generates new responsibilities and new obligations. Emotional stress and social precarity among students are growing. In COVID-19 times, caring labor in education takes on a whole new dimension. I try my best to make time despite the everyday responsibilities of keeping our household of five running smoothly in the unusual situation of all five of us, at times seven of us, with my older children’s partners also at our home almost all the time. I am under the strong feeling of growing pressure that I have the responsibility to find time, to make time for writing. I feel I have to contribute to reflecting the COVID-19 situation from a perspective rooted in care feminism and a politics of hope, particularly given that

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<sup>7</sup> Haraway, D., *Staying with the Trouble*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Truthout, *Despair and Disparity: The Uneven Burdens of COVID-19*, since February 2020, <https://truthout.org/series/despair-and-disparity-the-uneven-burdens-of-covid-19/page/20/> [accessed May 20, 2020]

research productivity by female academics and professors is declining as they bear the brunt of so-called social distancing labor, that is reproductive caring labor<sup>11</sup>. The Guardian reported that “Women’s research plummets during lockdown- but articles from men increase”<sup>12</sup>. If the same holds true for theoretical and scholarly work on COVID conditions, then we could end up with an extremely gendered perspective on COVID times, pandemic effects, and the perspectives offered on living and surviving with an infected planet. This could result in an extremely distorted view on recovery and on the creation of so-called normality in post-pandemic times.<sup>13</sup> As a cultural theorist interested in developing further feminist-materialist tools useful to the critical diagnosis of the ethical dimensions of the global present, the focus here is on the central terms of war and of care as they orient the crisis response. A comprehensive analysis of the terms of the response to the pandemic, which I plan to work on in the future, goes beyond the scope of this article and will also have to be written in months, maybe years to come, when it will be much better understood through research how the terms of the pandemic regime will have conditioned the post-pandemic orientations. All this work will have to be done in the future, it lies ahead.

Let me return to the approach of radical despair and radical hope. Despair acknowledges the profound feelings of loss and of sadness. Despair comes from acknowledging that one writes with those in mind who lost their lives, with those in mind who mourn their loved ones, with those in mind, who may not recover, with those in mind whose lives are in peril, with those in mind who are at risk, who are isolated, fearful, lonely, and most vulnerable. Radical despair is my general response to the continuous crisis of the global present. The twenty-first century is a period of interlinked crises conditions, the climate crisis, the food crisis, the housing crisis, the health crisis, the education crisis, the land crisis, the water crisis, the economic crisis, the political crisis, the social crisis, the violence crisis, the homophobic crisis, the misogynist crisis, the transphobic crisis, the racist crisis, the xenophobic crisis. The list is incomplete. The twenty-first century is characterized by the proliferation of crises. There is an understanding that living in the global present means to live in a continuous state of crisis. The crises are interlinked and amplify each other. Radical hope is also my response to the continuous crisis of the global present. Hope can inspire change. Hope can inspire the energy to insist on working for emancipatory

<sup>11</sup> See: Flaherty, C., «No Room of One’s Own», *Inside Higher Ed*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity> [accessed May 20, 2020]

<sup>12</sup> Fazackerley, A., «Women’s research plummets during lockdown - but articles from men increase», *The Guardian*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/12/womens-research-plummets-during-lockdown-but-articles-from-men-increase> [accessed May 20, 2020]

<sup>13</sup> The argument of the missing perspective of women and the missing perspective on women in terms of empirical studies and data has been backed with evidence in the following book: Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women. Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, London, Vintage, 2019. In theoretical and methodological terms, densifying objectivity and starting from the perspective of women’s and other marginalized groups lived experience was developed by feminist standpoint theory. See Harding, S., *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women’s Lives*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991 and Harding, S., *Sciences from Below. Feminism, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2008. Women’s lives as starting point for thinking what living with the crisis of an infected planet means is particularly pertinent, since women perform the brunt of caring labor, but are also hit the most by the current recession referred to as shecession. See: Gupta, A. H., «Why Some Women Call this Recession a “Shecession”», *New York Times*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html> [accessed May 20, 2020].

political transformation. The enormity of crises is such that system change can be the only way forward. In light of our historical conjuncture at the intersection of many interconnected crisis, despair and hope then become powerful frameworks for thinking the present moment and the future together, for thinking about living with the infected planet in the future. The starting points of despair and hope are not premised on the notion that the planet will be strong and well any time soon. The starting points of despair and hope are premised on the notion of a long and dedicated process of taking care of the infected planet. There is no such thing as speedy recovery for the infected planet. I use the idea of the infected planet to speak about the COVID situation, but I also use the idea of the infected planet to foreground that the corona virus outbreak took place on an already infected planet. The infection of the planet is caused by the continuous catastrophe otherwise known as capitalism. Much scholarship by critical race scholars, by feminist scholars, by queer-feminist scholars, by Marxist scholars, and, more recently, by environmental and multi-species scholars, is dedicated to the analysis of this continuous catastrophe with its permanent attack on life and nature. Much of this scholarship goes beyond analysis. It invites and urges to think and to create different futures. Since the turn of the millennium, the conditions that have been created by industrialization with its logic of the factory, the plantation, the mine, and the oilfield, are referred to as Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Plantationocene<sup>14</sup>. Infection is not the planet's natural condition. The infected planet has been produced. The infected planet is still being produced. Its ongoing and recurrent infection results from the continuous catastrophe caused by the nightmarish and deadly modern narratives of human exceptionalism, rationalism, and liberalism. The most recent versions of which have created the neoliberalization of the mind brainwashed through reconfiguring market choice as freedom and self-care as competitive advantage over others. Progress-cum-innovation, growth-cum-profit, and productivity-cum-independence have been heralded as the authoritative master narratives since the beginnings of modern racial and patriarchal capitalism. The colonial present results in disregarding the needs of bodies through stripping them of their humanity. Rendering the bodies of some dispensable in today's regime of neoliberal capitalism is the root cause of the "general crisis".<sup>15</sup> This is the continuous catastrophe with its permanent general crisis which the virus crisis exposes, and deepens.

Hope does not come easily. The scales are tipped to despair. I have to convince myself to believe in the possibility of hope. I hope for hope. I do not give up on hope. I hope that "the virus as teacher" teaches lessons for taking on the present, for not leaving behind the experience of ontological vulnerability and lack of preparedness we are experiencing in present for thinking and building post-pandemic futures.<sup>16</sup> There is hope that these lessons make understood that a system built on violent inequality and injustice cannot offer the response necessary for living with an infected planet.

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<sup>14</sup> Haraway, D., «Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin», in *Environmental Humanities*, 6.1 (May 2015), pp. 159-165.

<sup>15</sup> Fraser, N., «Contradictions of capital and care», in *New Left Review* 100 (July/August 2016), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, A.M., «Care for yourself and everything else», April 29, 2020, <http://adriennemarebrown.net/tag/covid-19/> [accessed May 20, 2020].

## 2. Respond we Must: At War with the Virus

How to respond? The question of response *is* the question of COVID times. Crisis response is a specific term in the political and economic vocabulary of dealing with crisis. In the language of emergency services, the response time is the time between a call for such services being made and the arrival of the ambulance where it is needed. In all crises, time is of the essence. Working on response time is part of preparedness. Ranging from governments, transnational organizations, the public sector, the private sector, grassroots organizations, and mutual aid networks, there is a large number of very different actors in the diverse economy of crisis responses<sup>17</sup>. The term crisis response not only refers to the planning processes. Crisis response includes all the actions that are taken in order to deal with urgencies and emergencies of crises and disasters, including so-called natural and so-called man-made disasters. To respond means to act in return, to give an answer. The answers that are given to the conditions of the virus, to living and surviving with the virus crisis constitute the crisis response. These actions define the conditions of living under a pandemic regime. These responses are a matter of life and death. And, as we can easily see, response and responsibility share the same Latin root. Response and responsibility are etymologically connected. Taking etymology to have implications beyond the study of language, we come to understand, that response and responsibility are tied to each other in ethical, social, and political terms. Can we trust that this close link between response and responsibility is actually fully understood and respected in ethical, social, and political terms? Can we trust that the concrete obligations that come from this link actually are the ethical and practical basis for preparedness for crisis response? Political and economic realities continuously shatter this trust. Yet, a politics of hope does not despair, does not give up on insisting that we have to closely link together response and responsibility. It matters that responses are responsible. It matters how responsibility is being understood, defined, and being enacted through responding, in particular through responding to crisis conditions. Haraway writes the following about learning, living, staying with the trouble, and response-ability: “learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth”<sup>18</sup>. We have to learn the response-ability of living and dying with an infected planet. Haraway rightly and lucidly coined the neologism “response-ability” which foregrounds being enabled to respond<sup>19</sup>. Being enabled to respond, being made response-able, is, of course, largely a matter of systemic responsibility. The same holds true for the opposite. Being disabled to respond, not being made response-able, is, of course, also largely a matter of systemic responsibility. Response-ability has to be understood in both its material-infrastructurel and in its socio-political dimensions. In order to be able to respond adequate material and infrastructurel

<sup>17</sup> See for example the focus on Crisis Response in the United Nations Development Program and their response to COVID-19: «UNDP and Hackster.io partner to launch a global innovation challenge to tackle COVID-19», April 14, 2020, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/undp-and-hackster-io-partner-to-launch-a-global-innovation-chall.html> [accessed May 30, 2020] or the crisis response in grassroots organizing by Interoccupy, «National Grassroots C-19 Crisis Response Call Wednesday March 18, 5 P PST, 8 P PST», <https://www.facebook.com/events/everywhere/covid-19-national-crisis-response/206250263811599/> [accessed May 30, 2020] and Interoccupy, «Mobilizing in a Pandemic», <https://myaccount.maestroconference.com/conference/register/KA05653LSV0FL0D?fbclid=IwAR23inIOH29qFmRxeOyOOGvOWuN6hXOUHajMLn5uw6gXZ7sIXc-jpq-dyY> [accessed May 30, 2020].

<sup>18</sup> Haraway, Donna, *Staying with the Trouble*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.



conditions are necessary. In order to be able to respond means and structures of social and political communication and participation are necessary. The failures of systemic responsibility have far-reaching and deadly consequences. The failures of system responsibility result in exposure to risk and to harm, understood again in its material-infrastructure and socio-political dimensions. In times of continuous crisis response systemic responsibility is put to the test. Crisis response shows how well prepared or how badly prepared systems are. Crisis response exposes the shortcomings and failures of systemic responsibility. In particular, crisis response exposes the pre-existing conditions of increased risk, harm, and vulnerability due to systemic material-infrastructure and socio-political injustice.

The language of war and the necessity of care define the pandemic crisis. Of particular interest to how war and care present public pandemic imaginaries central to virus narratives are two public addresses to the nations of France and Germany. Mid-March 2020, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron and the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, gave televised addresses to their respective nations. Many major media outlets internationally have reported about the different notions of governance and leadership clearly revealed through their speeches. On March 16, 2020 the New York Times published an article titled with the following title: “Macron Declares France ‘at War’ With Virus, as E.U. Proposes 30-Day Travel Ban”<sup>20</sup>. This article describes the measures that France implemented in order to prevent the further spread of the corona virus with its shutdown rules ordering people to stay at home and not leave unless for essential activities. travel restrictions. Of interest to my purpose here is the “martial language” adopted by Macron<sup>21</sup>. “The enemy is invisible and it requires our general mobilization”<sup>22</sup>. The article ends with an original quote by the French president: “We are at war”<sup>23</sup>. Two days later, on March 18, 2020 the German chancellor Angela Merkel delivered a rare nationwide TV address. “The situation is serious. Take it seriously. Since German unification, no, since the Second World War, there has been no challenge to our nation that has demanded such a degree of common and united action”, Merkel said<sup>24</sup>. Of interest to this essay is the care-full language adopted by Merkel. She speaks of solidarity, of vulnerability, and of the responsibility citizens have toward each other. “This is what an epidemic shows us: how vulnerable we all are, how dependent on the considerate behavior of others”<sup>25</sup>. And Merkel drew on everyday experience to underline that it can be difficult to conceive of distancing as the closest thing to care possible at the moment. “We want to be close to one another, especially in times of need... Unfortunately, the opposite is true at the moment. And everyone really has to understand that at the moment only distance is an expression of care”<sup>26</sup>. While both of these speeches can,

<sup>20</sup> Erlanger, S., «Macron Declares France “at War” With Virus, as E.U. Proposes 30-Day Travel Ban», New York Times, March 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/world/europe/coronavirus-france-macron-travel-ban.html> [accessed May 30, 2020].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> Kirschbaum, K., «Not since World War II’: Merkel implores Germany to rise to the challenge of pandemic», *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-rmanyerkerl> [accessed May 22, 2020]

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> Huggler, J. «Coronavirus is Germany’s biggest challenge “since World War II” Angela Merkel says», *The Telegraph*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/18/coronavirus-germanys-biggest-challenge-since-second-world-war/> [accessed May 22, 2020].

of course, first and foremost be understood as instructions to the population, as call to following the pandemic rules, they also have to be understood as political currency in ideological terms.

The French President Macron was not the only one who engaged in masculinist and patriarchal war-talk. Other heads of state also mobilized the war imaginary to address the populations of their nations, to speak to the global public, and to frame the virus as the enemy. US President Donald Trump spoke about “our war against the Chinese virus”<sup>27</sup>. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that “We must act like any wartime government”<sup>28</sup>. War talk mobilizes the political power of the nation as an “imagined community” under threat, a community bound together by one shared enemy, the virus. Interviewed by a journalist, historian Barbara Stelzl-Marx pointed out that the virus situation is not a war. She stated that “war is the oldest form of organized violence, a legitimized killing of people defined as the enemy of one’s own group”<sup>29</sup>. Martial language serves to induce fear and to enforce the strict following of rules. Yet, martial language also serves as propaganda tool for violence. Fear-mongering, xenophobia, racism, classism, police violence, and domestic violence are rising because of the pandemic. The war terminology normalizes everyday militarization of police forces and security workers. “With their war-talk, (neo-) imperial nation-states are expanding their powers while thriving on latent ethno-nationalism, patriarchy and class stratification”<sup>30</sup>.

In historical terms, war is strangely close to care. The first professionalization of nurses is tied to the experience of war with the nurse Florence Nightingale organizing professional care for wounded soldiers in the Crimean War which consequently led to the establishment of nursing as a female profession. Even in Angela Merkel’s speech, even though premised on care taking practices and solidarity, war was strangely present. She linked the realities of the health care workers to the conditions of care in times of war. Merkel described the health care workers as “on the front line for us in this battle”<sup>31</sup>. The pandemic terminology turns the essential worker, also referred to as key worker, into the new frontline worker. Health and social care then become the frontline where the war against the virus is being waged. Following the war terminology, the other sectors that are essential work such as education, key public services, local and national government, food and goods provisions, public safety and national security, key financial services, utilities, communications, transport and delivery, could then be called the pandemic hinterland. The majority of the essential workers, both at the pandemic frontline and in the pandemic hinterland, are low-

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, B., and Berenson, T., «“Our Big War”. As Coronavirus Spreads, Trump Refashions Himself as a Wartime President», *Time*, March 19, 2020, <https://time.com/5806657/donald-trump-coronavirus-war-china/> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>28</sup> Boris, J., «Coronavirus: We must act like any wartime government», BBC News, March 17, 2020, [https://www.bbc.com/news/video\\_and\\_audio/headlines/51936760/coronavirus-we-must-act-like-any-wartime-government](https://www.bbc.com/news/video_and_audio/headlines/51936760/coronavirus-we-must-act-like-any-wartime-government) [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>29</sup> Metzger, I., «Historikerin: Propaganda hat jetzt Hochsaison. Emmanuel Macron und andere verwenden in ihren Reden Kriegsvokabular. Historikerin Barbara Stelzl-Marx analysiert, was der Hintergedanke dieser martialischen Rhetorik ist», *Kurier*, March 29, 2020, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/historikerin-barbara-stelzl-marx-ueber-coronaviruspropaganda-hat-jetzt-hochsaison/400796057> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>30</sup> Schwobel-Patel, C., «We don’t need a “war” against coronavirus. We need solidarity», April 6, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/don-war-coronavirus-solidarity-200402080332560.html> [accessed May 2020].

<sup>31</sup> AFP, «Corona virus pandemic is Germany’s biggest challenge since World War II, warns Merkel», March 18, 2020, <https://www.thelocal.de/20200318/breaking-coronavirus-is-germanys-biggest-challenge-since-world-war-ii-says-merkel> [accessed May 20, 2020].

wage workers. They are nurses, home aides, supermarket workers, shelf stackers, delivery drivers, fruit and vegetable pickers, child and youth welfare service workers ... The majority of these frontline workers are female. Already in 2019, a working paper published by the World Health Organization about “Gender equity in the health Workforce” presented an “Analysis of 104 countries” and stated that “women form 70% of workers in the health and social sector”<sup>32</sup>. Even though social distancing rules were in place and people were advised to stay at home to keep safe, the frontline workers had to go out to keep the system running. Antiracist feminist activist and scholar Françoise Vergès has spoken about frontline workers in her interview “Les confinés ne sont que la parti visible de la situation”<sup>33</sup>. Vergès stresses that there are many who cannot afford to stay home, others depend on their services, that is why they have to go out to work in pandemic times rather than staying in shelter. This army that has to fight the war against the virus and keeps the pandemic hinterland going is female and feminized, underpaid and overworked. They are joined by all the parents, again mostly female, who, since schools and day care were under lockdown orders, had to perform schooling and caring activities free of charge at home, with many mothers losing their jobs or threatened by unemployment. In so-called normal times, all these essential workers are largely marginalized, made invisible, almost completely disappeared from recognition, and undervalued, in economic and social terms. Feminist Marxists and critical race feminists have for decades produced critical work on the extraction and exploitation of unpaid and underpaid reproductive labor. Most recently, the manifesto *Feminism for the 99%* co-authored by Cinzia Arruza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser has analyzed “the present crisis as a crisis of capitalism”<sup>34</sup>. The three authors proposed “to join with every movement that fights for the 99 percent, whether by struggling for environmental justice, free high-quality education, generous public services, low-cost housing, labor rights, free universal health care, or a world without racism or war”<sup>35</sup>. The efficacy of the war imaginary and its propagandistic currency is frightening. Promising survival and care to the imagined community under threat conceals the effective militarization of conditions. The narratives, imaginaries, and terminologies of war breed violence and the normalization of militarization in everyday life. War sanctions killing. War is an ideology of death. A very much needed new care order which responds to the crisis of the infected planet and works for future preparedness to crisis conditions can never emerge from the war imaginary. A new way of organizing the economy based on the principles of care can only emerge from a politics that acknowledges mutual interdependence in care and builds solidarity through collaboration.

<sup>32</sup> Bonol, B., Mclsaac, M., Xu, L., Wuliji, T., Diallo, K., and Campbell, J., «Gender equity in the health Workforce. Analysis of 104 countries», in *Health Force Working Paper 1. World Health Organization* (March 2019), <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf> [accessed April 6, 2020]

<sup>33</sup> Vergès, V., «Les confinés ne sont que la parti visible de la situation», interviewed by Fanny Marlier, *Les Inrockuptibles*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.lesinrocks.com/2020/03/20/idees/idees/francoise-verges> [accessed April 4, 2020].

<sup>34</sup> Arruza, C., Bhattacharya, T., Fraser, N., *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto*, London and New York, Verso, 2019, pp. 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

### 3. Care Feminism: Continued Living with an Infected Planet

“Virus too is a teacher” Adrienne Maree Brown has written on her COVID blog. How can we embrace a pedagogy of the virus? How can we learn from the virus as teacher? What are its instructions? The pandemic condition illuminates the ties that bind us together. Interdependence in human and more-than-human entanglements is at the center of collective survival and of living with an infected planet. Survival hinges on care. Already in 1990, feminist political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto together with the educational philosopher Berenice Fisher has written the following: “Survival establishes the fundamental context of caring. As a species, we have no choice about engaging in caring activities”<sup>36</sup>. The pandemic has alerted the global population of the planet to this. Care is, of course always at the center of collective survival, but now, in the most urgent conditions, the essentiality of care is finally being globally recognized. The essentiality of care is not an abstract feminist care ethical concept, but a reality hinging on practical and material doings, on adequate numbers of care workers, on adequate provision of masks and protective gear for care workers, on sufficient health care infrastructures, on access to food and shelter, on the possibility to actually stay safe and practice bodily distancing. As the pandemic shows, providing the best care possible for all individuals is the basis for collective survival. Yet, the best possible care for all individuals around the world is not enabled and supported by the global realities with its environmental, and social injustice. Therefore, pandemic ethics that place the care for survival at the center are in conflict with the global realities created by the economic conditions. Pandemic hashtags such as #wereallinthisogether, #takecareofyourself and #takecareofothers illuminate every day that care is essential, that we all depend on care, and that we are mutually interdependent in care and on care. The rules for surviving the pandemic converge in the inseparability of taking care of oneself and of taking care of others. We have to think the inseparability in care on all levels, from the level of the individual body to the level of the planet, from the level of the home to the level of the government, from the level of the community to the level of global international relations. With the lives of millions in peril because of the COVID-19 virus, the pandemic has made care the utmost priority.

Globally, crisis response is only as good as the worst preparedness for crisis. Globally, care is only as good as the worst provisions made for the most vulnerable. These are the lessons of virus as teacher. With collective survival at stake we understand how badly prepared the global system of predatory capitalism administered through political decision makes in national and transnational contexts leaves us for crisis, and therefore for continued living with the infected planet. The structural relations shaped by the interests of the global economy and a politics of injustice and discrimination result in the maximization of racialized and gendered poverty and vulnerability. Across the globe marginalized communities, in particular Afrodiasporic communities and indigenous communities. Communities at risk are disproportionately affected by the crisis. The virus has laid bare global ill-preparedness. Even though we are still in the midst of the global crisis, talk about post COVID-19 futures has already begun. What will our response to preparing for

<sup>36</sup> Tronto, J. and Fisher, B., «Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring», in Abel, E. K. and Nelson, M. K. (eds), *Circles of Care. Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 39.

post-pandemic futures be like? What will the premises be? How will preparedness orient the preparations? “In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations”<sup>37</sup>. Haraway cautions to clear away the past. The past cannot be cleared away. Clearing away the responsibility for the past is part of the arsenal of warfare practiced under colonial capitalist patriarchy. In particular, genocidal societies, like the society where I live in the context of Vienna, Austria, have a particular obligation of not clearing away the past. Angela Merkel’s warning that Germany was facing its greatest challenge since World War II, addressed, albeit indirectly, the question of how the past is being accounted for in the present and in the future.

After the end of World War II, post-war Germany and post-war Austria engaged in the violent myth of the Zero Hour. These countries’ hegemonic historical narratives were premised on the ideology of a new beginning, of a clean cut, of overcoming the past, of a fresh start for recovery. Zero Hour is a cruel and harmful lie. Ideologically, Zero Hour is related to the colonial and modern paradigms of *terra nullius* and *tabula rasa*. The past cannot be abolished. Therefore, the safe future is a lie, as the future will forever be haunted by the legacies, the wounds, the traumas, the unresolved crises of the past, which has once been the present. There is no Zero Hour for post-pandemic futures. The legacies of the virus impact inform the present we have to stay with. The legacies of colonial racist patriarchy with its anthropogenic destruction and toxic liberalism determines the brutal fault lines of racialized, sexualized, and gendered care injustice that are the historical root cause for structural ill-preparedness with its highly uneven and systemically unjust distribution of the risk of crisis exposure, contagion, and death. This past informs the pandemic present. This past will continue to inform the post-pandemic future. Therefore, we need to turn to the earlier introduced notion of staying with the crisis to work for preparedness as response to crisis. Staying with the crisis for continued living provides a different concept for beginning to prepare.

Feminist politics, practices, and methods provide a potent framework for working on preparedness in caring futures by way of staying with the crisis of the present. Firstly, feminism is a collaborative project premised on being unfinished business. Secondly, the feminist method of memory-work counteracts silencing and forgetting. Thirdly, feminist care ethics starts from the given, is based on mutual interdependence in vulnerability, and insists on the freedom to care. Fourthly, feminist Marxist reproduction theory offers a framework to understand the exploitation and extraction of caring labor. In real and political terms feminism is unfinished business because of its ongoing work on systemic transformation, but also because of the ongoing transformation of feminism itself. Nancy Fraser, for example, has analyzed how the capitalist turn to neoliberalism, not only coincided in time with second-wave feminism, but also led to neoliberalism resignification and cooption of feminist claims. Afrodiasporic, Latinx, indigenous, and other race critical feminists have called for a decolonization of White-centric feminism with feminism haunted by and entangled with imperialist-colonial legacies. These are just two examples for the ongoing revision and transformation within feminism which makes a

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<sup>37</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

feminist approach particularly apt for staying with the trouble in order to work for a transformative caring politics. That feminism is unfinished business responding to social, political, and economic change, and in particular to crisis, and that feminism is premised on its being unfinished business is evidenced by a new global transnational feminist movement in the twenty-first century with networks like NiUnaMenos, with the global Women's March, with the networks around the Women's Strike, and with the most recent emergence of COVID-19 feminism. Manifestos like *Feminism for the 99%* by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser provide significant and most relevant entry points for preparedness for crisis response. Their manifesto for "a restless anticapitalist feminism" is based on the premise "that we fight against capitalism's weaponization (sic!) of our differences"<sup>38</sup>. In the 1970s, feminist Marxist Frigga Haug, together with Kornelia Hauser, developed the method of memory-work which centrally focuses on bridging personal experience and theory through relying on collective processes of investigating memory for political and personal liberation and transformation<sup>39</sup>. Such a method can and could be very useful to work against the erasure of virus lessons, against the strategic annihilation of COVID experiences including the systemic injustice caused by past and present injustice, and for working toward liberation and transformation collaboratively. Feminist care ethics starts not from abstract notions of moral, but from concrete and lived experience. Joan Tronto has described the complexity of interdependence in care. "It is important to realize that we are receivers as well as givers of care, acted upon as well as agents. This is a difficult position to understand politically, but strength and human cooperation can arise from our recognition of our mutual interdependence"<sup>40</sup>. We cannot live without care. Understanding the necessity, the essentiality of care, as a mutual condition offers a framework to work against the exploitative commodification of care and of turning the essential worker into an army at war with pandemic conditions. Caring, as Tronto states, always "starts in the middle of things"<sup>41</sup>. This is helpful to understand the future as a continuation of the present with both the present and the future open to the caring and care-full work of economic and political transformation. While the current war imaginary definitely hinges on the essentiality of care, war is always connected to the idea of an operational chain of command and obedience, Tronto argues for a different approach to the indispensability, to the necessity, to the essentiality of care. Her political approach argues for freedom. Freedom is not the kind of freedom that neoliberalism sells us as hyper-individualized forms of choice or merit. The confusion of choice with freedom, and the confusion of merit with rights, are the two fundamental errors threatening care through the economization of life under neoliberal reason. Tronto offers a powerful instruction for pandemic realities and post-pandemic living with an infected planet: "A truly free society makes people free to care"<sup>42</sup>. Feminist Marxist social reproduction theory offers a potent analytical framework to understand the conditions of caring labor under capitalism as they also feed into the notion of the

<sup>38</sup> Arruzza, C., Bhattacharya, T. and Fraser, N., *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto*, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> See: Haug, F., *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Erinnerungsarbeit*, Hamburg, Argument-Verlag, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Tronto, J., «Caring democratically: A response to neopopulism, lecture», University of Venice, May 13, 2019, <https://hscif.org/tronto/> [accessed May 20, 2020]

<sup>41</sup> Tronto, Joan, *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

caring worker as frontline worker under pandemic conditions. Cinzia Arruzza, one of the three authors of *Feminism for the 99%*, has written the following about social reproduction in pandemic conditions. “The COVID-19 pandemic is bringing to light, in the clearest possible way, the fundamental contradiction between social reproduction, or the activity of life-making, and the mad pursuit of profits within capitalist production”<sup>43</sup>. In feminist Marxist terminology caring labor is referred to as social reproduction. Following Marx labor-power exists in the living body of the worker<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the living body has to be kept alive. Therefore, the living body as the laboring body has to be reproduced. This is essentially the purpose of caring labor according to feminist Marxist analysis. Interestingly enough, the reproduction of what is essential to capitalism, the very reproduction of the living body, was organized outside of capitalist wage relations. Essential reproduction was essentially configured as unpaid or badly paid work. Largely racialized, sexualized, and gendered, reproductive labor was chained to capitalism. “If the owner of labor-power works today, tomorrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a working individual”<sup>45</sup>. With the continuation of life, which hinges on care, constitutive to human life, capitalism cunningly exploited this condition of essentiality as that which humans cannot live without. As many feminist Marxist theorists have pointed out, the conditions for social reproduction are a “product of history”<sup>46</sup>. While care is always essential and indispensable to human life and earthly survival, the way in which care is being organized and provided is clearly a product of history and therefore open to future transformation. This is key to imagining a different organization of preparedness for response to crisis critically organized around the collaborative and collective organization of care<sup>47</sup>. An economy organized around care presents a radical care feminist perspective for continued living with an infected planet.

Care feminism is above all a political project. Care feminism stays with the crisis. Care feminism is about what continued living with an infected planet could be. The centrality of care could inform a different economy and a different politics. On her COVID-blog doula, women’s rights activist, and author adrienne maree brown has written the following on April 29, 2020: when I listen to my bones the instruction is care: care for this body and all other bodies, (...) care generally for futures, or specifically for your own future and the futures of those you can care for. On her blog Vandana Shiva has written the following on March 18, 2020: “We are one Earth Family on one planet, healthy in our diversity and interconnectedness. The planet’s health and our health is inseparable”<sup>48</sup>. Care feminism starts from this very premise of the centrality of inseparability, interconnectedness, and interdependence in our ontological vulnerability. Care feminism works for an economy and a politics that

<sup>43</sup> Arruzza, C., «We Don’t Want to Go Back to Normal: COVID-19 and Women’s Struggles», May 6, 2020, <https://rosaluxnycblog.org/covid19-and-womens-struggles/> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>44</sup> Marx, K., *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, tran. Fowkes, B., New York, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 272.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p., 275.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> See: Federici, S., *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, Oakland, PM Press, Brooklyn, Autonomedia, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Shiva, V., «Ecological Reflections on the Corona Virus. One Planet, One Health – Connected through Biodiversity», *Jivad – The Vandana Shiva Blog*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.navdanya.org/bija-reflections/2020/03/18/ecological-reflections-on-the-corona-virus/> [accessed April 4, 2020].

counteracts the reality of the dictatorship of viral capitalism ruled by growth through destruction, productivity through extraction, progress through extinction, and profit through exhaustion. Care feminism values the essentiality of care and pushes back against the war imperative of frontline duty. Care feminism stands up for continued living with and taking care of infected planet where life is no longer subordinated to labor, and nature is not considered a resource to be extracted and exploited. Care feminism starts from the premise of caring for life and survival and is therefore a potent antidote to capitalism's necropower and the politics of war mobilized in the virus crisis<sup>49</sup>. And, finally, feminism is a politics of hope and of solidarity. There are many emergent feminist responses to COVID-19 that stay with the crisis as they think with recovery. There is the *Feminist emergency plan in the face of the Coronavirus crisis* for new forms of communally sharing care and collectively fighting against sexualized and gendered violence published by the Coordinadora feminista 8M in Chile are leading the way and make it possible to envision a new care order.<sup>50</sup> There is the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women at the Department of Human Services in the State of Hawai'i with their publication of *A Feminist Recovery Plan for COVID-19* titled *Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs*<sup>51</sup>. The website Feminist response to COVID-19 "comes together in a moment of global organizing" in order to work for "a just and resilient recovery"<sup>52</sup>. Signed by 1156 feminist networks, organizations, and individuals the website published a *Statement of Feminists and Women's Rights Organizations from the Global South and marginalized communities in the Global North* focusing on the following key areas of food security, healthcare, education, water and sanitation, economic inequality, violence against women, access to information, and abuse of power.<sup>53</sup> Care feminism is a political project. Acknowledging despair allows for a politics of hope in the continuous catastrophe otherwise known as twenty-first century. Care feminism is about not giving up despite the critical condition of a seriously infected planet. Care feminism is about staying with the crisis understanding that all decisions are always on trial.

#### 4. Instead of a Conclusion: No Going Back to Normal: Pandemic Solidarity for Collaborative Survival

In May 2020, reports state that there are "more than 5.5 million confirmed cases in 188 countries" and that "more than 340,000 people have lost their lives."<sup>54</sup> This is the reality

<sup>49</sup> See: Mbembe, A., *Necropolitics*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Coordinadora feminista 8M, «Feminist emergency plan in the face of the Coronavirus crisis», *Toward Freedom. A Progressive Perspective on World Events Since 1952*, March 19, 2020, <https://towardfreedom.org/blog-blog/chilean-womens-movement-releases-feminist-emergency-plan-in-the-face-of-the-coronavirus-crisis/>. [accessed April 4, 2020]

<sup>51</sup> Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women at the Department of Human Services in the State of Hawaii, *Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs. A Feminist Recovery Plan for COVID-19*, April 14, 2020, <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4.13.20-Final-Cover-D2-Feminist-Economic-Recovery-D1.pdf> [accessed May 20, 2020]

<sup>52</sup> *Feminist Response to COVID-19*, no date, <https://www.feministcovidresponse.com/about> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>53</sup> *Statement of Feminists and Women's Rights Organizations from the Global South and marginalized communities in the Global North*, <https://www.feministcovidresponse.com/> [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>54</sup> The Visual and Data Journalism Team, «Coronavirus pandemic: Tracking the global outbreak», *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51235105> [accessed May 20, 2020].



we live in. Despair looms large. Hope is not easily maintained. How then does the virus change writing? How is the different response-ability the virus asks from writing being understood? How does writing that starts from accepting this different response-ability become a responsible response to the virus condition? How does the writing find the approach to register this change wrought by the virus as it deeply exacerbates the crisis of living with the continuous catastrophe of an already infected planet in the state of permanent crisis? Times of crisis, even more than any other times, call for diagnosis, in political, social, economic, and cultural terms. With crisis, as introduced earlier, exposing judgement to dispute, diagnosis is not only an analytic framework, but offers a possibility for prospective thinking. Relying on the unusual alliance of radical despair and radical hope I have written about the contradictions of war and care as they centrally define the political and public imaginaries and narratives of the global pandemic. At the confluence of virus crisis and climate crisis, radical despair and radical hope aid the process of diagnosis in order to imagine a possible treatment and a process of healing for the infected planet. The planet has, in fact, been infected for a very long time. Infection is Man-made. Since the industrialization with its labor system of factories and of plantations, with its extraction paradigm of turning life and nature into commodities, the virus of colonial capitalist patriarchy that has spread over the planet. The corona virus is a threat to human life. The virus of colonial capitalist patriarchy is a threat to human life. Scientists predict that the number of viruses that pose a threat to human life will increase in the future. Rapid urbanization and “the conversion of nearly half of the world’s land into agriculture” will increase the chances of human-animal interaction in what is left of tropical forests<sup>55</sup>. Such increased zoonotic, animal-to-human transmission of disease will most likely be the reason for further future pandemics. Therefore, preparing for preparedness, preparing for crisis response is crucial to living and surviving with an infected planet.

War and care have been central to determining and shaping the response to crisis, which has revealed the brutality of racialized and gendered ill-preparedness affecting the most vulnerable marginalized and impoverished communities at risk. War with its close links to the idea of the state of exception offers state-sanctioned violence as a response to crisis in lieu of protection through preparedness<sup>56</sup>. The ideology of war and its closely related framework of the state of exception requires obedience and (forced) participation. A masculinist politics of war with its militarization breeds violence. Violence breeds violence. Care with its close links to a politics of solidarity offers relatedness and interdependence in mutuality as response to crisis in order to work for preparedness through collaborative protection.

Understanding the present conjuncture as a call to action must not be mistaken with a call to going back to normal, to returning to the way it was before the corona virus outbreak. This is the state of continuous catastrophe written about earlier. The world we have lost was a frantic world in turmoil, a world living at the edge of the ongoing sixth mass extinction event, a world teetering on the brink of ecological destruction, collapse. If world leaders and business leaders, if people in general, think about post-pandemic futures as rushing back to the status quo before the COVID-19

<sup>55</sup> Jordan, R., «Stanford researchers show how forest loss leads to spread of disease», April 8, 2020, Stanford News, <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/04/08/understanding-spread-disease-animals-human/> [accessed May 2020].

<sup>56</sup> Agamben, G., «L’invenzione di un’epidemia», Quodlibet, February 26, 2020, <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-l-invenzione-di-un-epidemia> [accessed April 4, 2020].

outbreak, they are continuing a politics of ruthless care-lessness premised on global inequality. Care feminism is restorative. Yet, care feminism is not about restoring the pre-pandemic world as we knew it since this world was based on a politics of global capitalist destruction and toxic human exceptionalism. “As a matter of fact, the present crisis is exposing the fundamental contradiction between life-making and Capitalism (...)”<sup>57</sup>. Care feminism is about taking care of the infected planet as best as possible. What we have to work for and fight for in “solidarity beyond the crisis” is a structural transformation that prevents the economy from returning to the status of global injustice, inequality, and destruction<sup>58</sup>. Care feminism is a long-term perspective focused on healing and repairing. There is no techno-fix for the climate catastrophe. There is no vaccination against colonial racist patriarchy. Care feminism is a perspective of long-term care for the existing wounds inflicted by continuous catastrophe, for the new wounds inflicted by the pandemic.

The new rallying call for continued living and caring for an infected planet is “We Don’t Want to Go Back to Normal”<sup>59</sup>. Going back to normal is deadly. Wanting to go back to normal is destructive. Surviving and living with an infected planet hinges on mutual interdependence in care premised on “pandemic solidarity”<sup>60</sup>. Collective survival will be “collaborative survival”—or it will not be<sup>61</sup>.

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