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FORUM

Central European History in the Age of COVID-19

Guest edited by Christian Goeschel, Dominique Reill, and Lucy Riall

As COVID-19 began to spread across the globe in early 2020, few could have envisaged that it would so profoundly affect our personal and professional lives. In-class teaching soon had to be either replaced with online teaching or could only be carried out with great risk to staff and students. Working from home and a constant stream of video conferences became the norm instead of informal chats on departmental corridors. As if all of this were not bad enough, positions for junior academics, already scarce in the wake of the general financial crisis and the rise of the neoliberal university, were cut. Travel funding was slashed by many universities, and most countries closed their borders. Libraries were closed or could only be accessed with considerable difficulty. Archives were shut or, if they reopened, operated long waiting lists. In situ research, essential for historians of central Europe, became difficult, if not impossible.

What follows is a collection of timely essays (and, in one case, an interview) reflecting on this crisis, guest edited by Christian Goeschel (University of Manchester, United Kingdom), Dominique Reill (University of Miami, United States) and Lucy Riall (European University Institute, Florence, Italy). The idea for it emerged from an October 2020 session of the Rethinking Modern Europe research seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London—a series established in 2010 by Goeschel and Riall, alongside other colleagues from the United Kingdom. Thanks to the new online format of the seminar, a group of historians of central and southern Europe from Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States were able to assemble on that occasion to discuss how their research had been affected, what impact the current crisis will have on the historical discipline, and how historians can collaborate.

The guest editors invited some of those colleagues and a few others—all from different career stages and academic systems—to document their experiences and the key issues affecting those working in the field during COVID. These colleagues tell us that COVID has reinforced existing inequalities, notably (but not only) in terms of access to resources and research time and in the structure of academic careers. PhDs have had to be rethought. Those with childcare and other responsibilities have had to juggle career and home from home. Almost everyone spoke of stress, anxiety, exhaustion. But not everything is doom and gloom, as some of the contributions also demonstrate.

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Landscape for a Pandemic PhD

Joanna Curtis

In *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), the historian Carolyn Steedman described her girlhood in post–World War II Britain, where schools poured milk, orange juice, and vitamins down the throats of young students. For Steedman, this was an act of care by which the state communicated to working-class children that they belonged; the orange juice was more significant for her sense of worth and, in turn, her life trajectory than social class or the parenting of her single mother.[1] In postwar Britain, as in the welfare states on the European continent, the state was an essential source of physical, spiritual, moral, and cultural development for the nation and its children. Although the welfare state was no utopia, its achievements during the postwar decades were transformative. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has felt more evident than ever that we in the United States have been living a dystopian inversion of the world Steedman described, one in which possibility is being foreclosed for more and more children, in which not only those who have long been oppressed but all non-elites have neither milk nor school, in which children may lack what their mothers had. This inversion has salient implications for society and also within the historical discipline—for research, but perhaps more urgently, for our students and our public.

For many of us who finished PhDs when I did, late in 2019, a research agenda has seemed more like an optimistic affectation for job applications than something to have and to hold. This extends beyond impostor syndrome to a statistical reality that the American Historical Association described in its most recent, prepandemic jobs report as dire.[2] These problems are not novel; rather, the pandemic confirmed and intensified dynamics already afoot for cohorts around my vintage. At the time of my dissertation defense, every one of my twenty-plus cohort-mates at NYU was either adjuncting, still in graduate school, had left the program without finishing, or had moved, at minimum, hundreds of miles for a job or a postdoc, as we knew was expected if we wanted to have academic careers. Success meant becoming itinerant labor. None of these possibilities was especially appealing for me as a divorced mother. So, anticipating the demands of the academic job market, my need for a salary to support my daughter, and my hope of maintaining stability for her, I accepted a one-year contract teaching history at a private secondary school in Manhattan in 2019–20. The work, I expected, would be rewarding and undeniably historical. It paid better than a good postdoc. There were faculty at the school who managed to complete research and writing projects. My daughter, Madeleine, could remain at the neighborhood elementary school that she loved. On all of these grounds, I felt fortunate.

It turned out that I had made this transition in a historically bizarre and tragic year, one in which the stability I sought for Madeleine proved impossible. We live in Queens, two blocks

[1]Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 122–23.

[2]Dylan Ruediger, "The 2021 AHA Jobs Report: 2019–20 Data Show Relative Stability in the Year before COVID," *Perspectives on History*, January 2021.

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from the Elmhurst Hospital emergency room first dubbed the "epicenter of the epicenter" of the global pandemic in an April 2020 *New York Times* piece.[3] Like many families, with fourth grade effectively cancelled and other childcare options off the table, we found ourselves home together for months, our weeks punctuated by Madeleine's visits with her dad. Symptoms of the vicious times were dense within our walls. Before the sirens of New York City's outer boroughs were an early pandemic cliché, they were shrill and unceasing and terrifying. When I asked if she would like a new book, Madeleine requested *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Her online public school consisted of long lists of assignments that appeared online in the mornings without any instruction, recorded or otherwise, so I taught her. My employer, meanwhile, which primarily served a more rarefied social stratum, transferred the whole school day to Zoom remarkably seamlessly. From our dining table, I taught my classes in real time, thereby laying bare the inequalities of our society to Madeleine, who wondered aloud at the small size of my sections, about why her teachers did not video chat with her. In so many respects, we were lucky. We sat inside our prewar apartment, teaching, learning, and overeating, while our neighbors' funerals were financed via GoFundMes that circulated on the Google group for neighborhood parents; food lines stretched for blocks outside our window. Yet we were also so nearly upended, with Madeleine's father unemployed and my Plan B now clearly our lifeline. The school offered me a contract for the next year, and I said yes.

As we adjusted, if haltingly, to each new version of our upturned world, the themes of Steedman's book but also of my own paused research cropped up around us. The dissertation I had defended a few months earlier concerned the West German and Austrian states' deployment of classical music, at home and abroad, after Nazism. I am interested in children and youth's positioning in these efforts, which were heavily freighted with ideas about the future of the political community; the moral rehabilitation (or, in the case of Austria, purported innocence) of the nation, and Cold War–era notions of human development. Entangled with these issues were a laundry list of themes that the pandemic foregrounded in our own nation and world: material emergency caused by an economy in crisis, the welfare state or the absence of one, the impact of crisis on children and families; the gendered division of labor; the social and ideational foundations of democracy; the role of what often is called high culture in binding together a society; the intricate links between domestic spaces and global events; and more fundamentally, what a human life is worth and what care it merits. As the US pandemic soared to catastrophic levels, it became clearer than ever that a large portion of the public and the government itself were afflicted by a profound lack of ambition and imagination about the role of the state. Our eviscerated society[4] had become a murderous one that shrugged at—or concealed, or disbelieved—mass death among the elderly, less healthy, less prosperous, and nonwhite communities while surrendering most children's education. Women and people of color left the workforce in droves.[5] Whole sectors of employment ceased to exist.

[3]Annie Correal and Andrew Jacobs, "'A Tragedy Is Unfolding': Inside New York's Virus Epicenter," *The New York Times*, April 9, 2020.

[4]The term *eviscerated society* is Tony Judt's. See Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 118.

[5]Elizabeth Weber Handwerker, et al., "Employment Recovery in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Monthly Labor Review* (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020).

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Historical comparison to central Europe has been fruitful in this moment. To take but one example, Germany in March 2020 passed a first stimulus in which 1 billion Euros were targeted to artists.[6] Meanwhile, that same month, some of the largest American arts institutions, including the Metropolitan Opera and the National Symphony, furloughed their musicians, all union employees, without pay.[7] The unemployment benefits of nearly the entire live performance and service industries in the United States expired by the end of 2020, while the German state paid the full salaries of thousands of the country's artists.[8] These differences in pandemic response are rooted in twentieth-century history; particularly after World War II, the arts, or some of them, were understood as essential spiritual welfare for the nation and broader humanity in postwar central Europe—as public goods—and thus were a priority in the postwar reconstruction of society. Meanwhile, in the United States, art and cultural production have remained mostly a private matter of taste, philanthropy, and, above all else, profit. If the arts teach us something about how to be human, America signaled its desire early in 2020 to forget that thing.

In the spring, as classical music in the United States suffered its latest death, I had thought I might spend the summer with my manuscript—but following the death of George Floyd, as Black Lives Matter protestors marched in the streets of New York, the history I research once again took a back seat to the history outside my window and the history I teach. In the glow of America's ongoing racial reckoning, teaching young people has seemed more urgent and meaningful than ever—and if there is one constant in my pandemic year, it is that at every juncture, urgency and meaning have trumped planning and ambition. So, with my manuscript more dormant than the central European history job market, my colleagues and I pored over US and global histories of race, reworking curricula to foreground stories of Black and other marginalized people. In the fall, the students in the new gender history elective I had created were by any measure aside from age the most diverse group I'd ever taught: more pronouns, broader gender expression, a majority of non-European heritage. This was not the Upper East Side of *Gossip Girl*. With the enthusiasm of new researchers, they uncovered whole fields of scholarship in which they saw themselves and their peers. Together, we puzzled over the policy implications of bell hooks's and Octavia Butler's work, sought to identify Judith Bennett's patriarchal equilibrium around us, explored the matriarchal Khasi of India, delineated relationships between Black motherhood and American public policy in film, debated the persistence of single gender schools for a generation that is increasingly committed to gender fluidity, delineated shifting constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality over the longue durée. On the last day of class, with emoji hearts affixed to their Zoom squares, they shared how our course had shaped their college essays and interviews, identities, understandings of family, academic, and career ambitions. I had written a dissertation about how culture and education shaped minds and hearts after a war, after fascism, in an

[6] "Umfangreiche Soforthilfen für Kulturschaffende beschlossen," *Die Zeit*, March 24, 2020.

[7] Joshua Barone, "Opera Has Vanished. So Have Their Dream Jobs at the Met," *New York Times*, June 19, 2020; Peggy McClone and Michal Andor Brodeur, "After $25 Million Stimulus, Stunned NSO Players Receive One-Week Notice from Kennedy Center," *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2020; Kate Brown, "Germany Continues to Lead the Way in Culture Aid, Doling Out Another €1 Billion to the Sector and Lowering the Tax Rate on Art," artnet.com, June 4, 2020.

[8] Zachary Woolfe, "Two Friends, Two Continents, Very Different Pandemics," *New York Times*, January 13, 2021.

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Adenauerian moment, about how young people impacted and were impacted by these processes. In 2020, I leaned into our own, slantily rhyming national story.

The contraction of tenure-track opportunities in European history guarantees that more historians of the region will be employed primarily outside academia, as will (are) many PhDs in other fields. Tinged as this circumstance is by sadness for many of us, universities would be wrong to ignore the opportunities afforded by this situation in a country like the United States, where expertise and knowledge have come under fire, a phenomenon that did not begin nor end with the Trump administration. From our experience in the region we study, scholars of central Europe have intimate knowledge of societies in which the PhD is a valued credential in a far broader array of professional settings than in the United States; famously, a majority of German CEOs hold doctorates.[9] How might US universities collaborate to increase the perceived value of the PhD in our society? How might universities develop paths for PhD-holders to serve the social good? What initiatives within universities—with schools of public policy, education, communications, business, and law—would reduce friction for holders of the doctorate seeking careers outside academia? To take an example dear to me, teaching high school is arguably one of the more closely related jobs to academia that a PhD in history might seek, but the bureaucratic and financial hurdles to doing so in the public education system are significant. At NYU, none of my coursework from three graduate degrees in the social sciences would have transferred to the university's teacher certification program; to qualify, I would have needed to retake the GRE in the final year of my doctorate for admission and pay more than $50,000 for another degree. Surely, there is a better solution.

In 2010, Judt characterized the challenge of the eviscerated society as a discursive one: we had lost the language for discussing politics and society in all but the narrowest economistic terms.[10] In 2021, the challenges facing the United States and the world are bloodier, deadlier, and more divisive than Judt knew. Many recent PhD graduates in our field may never access the structural power to transform the historical profession meaningfully, but in the broader grid of society, we are a privileged bunch. Ta-Nehisi Coates has written of modern history, "Our story is a tragedy. I know it sounds odd, but that belief does not depress me. It focuses me."[11] My hope for us is Coates's focus amid tragedy—that we see with greater clarity the connections between our research and our world, that we show solidarity with and support for those who experience this moment's most bitter consequences, that we take part in social transformations we did not foresee. We could do worse than orange juice and education for all our children.

[9]Ferdinand Knauß, "Lasst das Promovieren sein!" *Die Zeit*, April 13, 2013.
[10]Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*, 34.
[11]Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), 289.

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Tackling the "Exceptional Normal": PhD Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Daniel F. Banks

FEBRUARY 1, 2021. As I sit down to write this brief contribution, I am repeatedly refreshing the website of the French *Archives Nationales* in the hope that I might obtain a spot in their reading room over the course of the next three weeks. The sixty available daily places generally vanish just moments after they are released online. A week before coming to Paris for a month-long research trip, I discovered that another of the archives I planned to visit—the *Service Historique de la Défense* in Vincennes—was fully booked until the end of March. Luckily, I can visit the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (BNF), with its vast collections of nineteenth-century newspapers and political pamphlets. Nonetheless, I will be unable to consult a fair number of sources that, at any other time, would have been essential for the writing of my dissertation on radical politics in the western Mediterranean from the 1850s to the 1870s.

That I am even in Paris right now is a stroke of extremely good luck. Before I left Florence, where I am a PhD student at the European University Institute (EUI), persistent rumors began to circulate about an imminent third lockdown in France, where a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is picking up speed. I thought I was about to cancel my fourth research trip in the space of a year. Then, on the evening before I planned to travel, the French government announced it would take any steps necessary to avoid another lockdown, for now. Which brings me here, to the intricate online bureaucracy of the *Archives Nationales* and the almost guilty pleasure of reading printed sources at the BNF, accompanied by a daily dash home after closing time to avoid a fine for breach of curfew and constant apprehension about a *reconfinement*, which might send me straight back to Florence.

Still, I am one of the lucky ones. I am one of the few early career scholars of European history who—thanks to the Schengen agreement and the summer thaw in public-health restrictions—have been able to organize last-minute research trips within the European Union. Our colleagues from outside the block have had to postpone all archival work for the foreseeable future. Within Europe itself, closed borders between EU and extra-EU countries have imposed a hierarchy of research opportunities: colleagues who work on Russia, for example, are in much the same situation as our extra-European peers.

This is to say nothing of those colleagues to whom the fatigues of online teaching have left precious little time for their PhD research. Or of those with duties of care that have made work on the dissertation all but impossible: as other contributions to this forum have discussed, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities within the historical profession. Even in normal times, writing a dissertation was an extremely stressful experience. To do so in the uncertainty of the current situation, as funding slowly expires and employment opportunities dwindle, can only compound the mental health impact of postgraduate studies. Some of us

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are more resilient and find ways to work around the difficulties of the current moment; others are not, and their struggles should be acknowledged and alleviated.

On a personal level, the best strategy for weathering the ebb and flow of restrictions to workspace and archival access has been to keep myself busy. During the first national lockdown in Italy in March 2020, I drafted my first dissertation chapter. I skimmed through the thousands of pictures I had taken in archives before the pandemic, picking out small gems that, in other circumstances, would have been lost in the depths of my external hard drive. I combed through online inventories, looking for folders, files, and boxes to target when I eventually returned to the archive. I puzzled over the arcane access methods for digitized archival sources and discussed how to approach these with colleagues at the EUI. I delved deeply into more familiar online resources, such as Google Books and the BNF's Gallica platform, downloading hundreds of digitized books, pamphlets, and newspapers that I might never have otherwise come across.

Still, none of these stratagems take us back to the archive, the peculiar institution that continues to define the historian's craft. No number of digitized pamphlets, newspapers, or handwritten documents can replace the materiality of the archive: the hidden inventories that resist the scanner's gaze; the friendly chats with archivists who can guide us through the collections; the materiality of the documents themselves; the way they are patterned in each box, allowing us to discover, and read against, what Ann Stoler has called "the archival grain."[1] The search functions of digitized collections conceal the hierarchies and power dynamics that structure the way documents come to rest in an archive. They deprive us of those surprises we often find lying side by side with the particular document we are examining. Given the many obstacles with which the path to the archive is now strewn, how can we tackle this problem?

A personal solution has been to investigate smaller archives. As PhD students, eager to hit the ground running on projects that are often overambitious in relation to the limited amount of time-constrained funding we are given, we tend to gravitate toward the large national archives, which are easy to pinpoint and offer a wealth of documentary options to explore. However, the endless waiting lists that these archives now operate are an incentive to look for sources elsewhere. One of my best archival trips has been to the municipal *Risorgimento* museum in Milan, where I spent two weeks in July 2020. I was often alone in the reading room, where I explored a wealth of material detailing the seaborne logistical effort, centered in Genoa, which underpinned Giuseppe Garibaldi's conquest of southern Italy in 1860. Not all smaller archives are easily accessible: the archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, admits only six researchers two days a week, making it almost completely off-limits. Those that we can reach, though, offer both a better environment and new possibilities for research.

Less well known, undersubscribed archives tell a different story of modern European history. The fact that many of these archives are located in smaller, provincial towns gives us a chance to restore importance to the events that happened in these places and to challenge preestablished notions of center and periphery. In the *Archivio di Stato* in Livorno, concealed above the local police headquarters, I gained a sense of the city's role as a fundamental node

[1] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

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for revolutionary mobilities that, among other things, brought European radicals as colonists to Algeria and led to the creation of an Italian state in 1861.

For a generation of historians steeped in debates on global history and the spatial turn, a focus on different localities can offer a way to move beyond the eerily persistent methodological nationalism that often blinds us to the myriad connections binding Europe to the wider world. At the same time, smaller bodies of more accessible sources can be an incentive to follow the best micro-historical traditions. After all, foundational works in this vein such as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* and Giovanni Levi's *Inheriting Power* were researched in small archives in places such as Udine and the village of Santena, near Turin.[2] In the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are far more likely to find Edoardo Grendi's famous "exceptional normal"—those unexpected documents leading to new insight on particular historical problems—through careful consideration of a smaller archive's collections than in fleeting visits to the overbooked reading rooms of larger establishments.[3] Nor should a micro-historical approach tie us to a particular locality. The recent proliferation of global micro-histories has shown how historians can combine a spatial sensitivity that challenges established boundaries with an intensive reading of sources that can shift our perception of the relationship between the general and the particular.[4]

My archival work has also been inspired by reflections on translocal or micro-spatial histories. Anne Gerritsen and Christian De Vito, among others, have tried to overcome the apparent local/global contradictions thrown up by global micro-histories by looking at the specific connections between particular places and the ways these entanglements construct spaces, so to speak, from below.[5] If we see every locality as constituted by the myriad connections and social networks that intersect it and their change over time, we can write process-oriented histories, based on multi-sited archival research, that avoid traditional spatial frameworks.

In my dissertation, I combine documents from larger and smaller archives to retrace the connections that revolutionaries forged and took advantage of in pursuit of their goals. I focus on particular people, localities, and events, and the processes in which they were enmeshed, rather than a series of strictly national histories. Thus, the case of Rinaldo Andreini, a doctor whose papers are held in his hometown of Imola, provides new insight on the connections among nineteenth-century radicalism, nationalism, and colonialism. Andreini, an ardent radical, spent most of his life in exile in Algiers, where he worked for the city's colonial health bureau and consorted with local republican settlers, joining the opposition to Napoleon III.[6] The links he forged between Imola and Algiers, by way of Livorno, Genoa, and Marseille, illustrate both the wider geography within which Italian state-building was inscribed and the multiplicity of European actors involved in colonial expansion in Algeria. These are precisely the sorts of stories that can emerge if we respond to the logistical

[2]Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il Cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, 5th ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1976); Giovanni Levi, *L'eredità Immateriale: Carriera di un Esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985).

[3]Edoardo Grendi, "Micro-Analisi e Storia Sociale," *Quaderni Storici* 12, no. 35 (2) (1977): 512.

[4]An excellent overview and some examples of the trend are in *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019).

[5]Christian G. De Vito and Anne Gerritsen, introduction to *Micro-Spatial Histories of Global Labour*, ed. Christian G. De Vito and Anne Gerritsen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–28.

[6]"Andreini, Rinaldo in 'Dizionario Biografico Treccani,'" http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/rinaldo-andreini.

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difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic by combing through lesser-known archives, keeping our eyes open for the unexpected connections they reveal.

Of course, this is no hymn to flexibilization as a solution to the increasing precarity early career historians face in the wake of the pandemic. The imperative to keep going, no matter what the vagaries of the situation might throw at us, can be damaging to our resilience and insulting to those laboring under constraints that deny them the time, presence of mind, or wherewithal needed to carry on. I have often felt disconsolate, over the past year, staring at social media feeds sprinkled with celebratory statements, proclaiming achievements that have come about "despite all of this." Far from glorifying a "keep calm and carry on" approach, I hope to have outlined a strategy to get back to the archive where possible, along with the conceptual tools by which this strategy can help shift perceptions of modern European history.

On a final note, we must also remember that this sort of research can both foster and benefit from collaborative practices. When we sift through smaller archives that have often flown under our radar, we have the opportunity to share the raw information we find with colleagues who work in similar establishments, or who don't have access to archives, helping us all to paint our histories in a finer grain and restoring an element of joy to research. For ultimately, it is the excitement of discovering a new piece of the puzzle in which we are all immersed, and the enthusiasm of sharing this insight with our peers and the wider world, that lie at the heart of our common craft.

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A (Zoom) Room of One's Own: Gender, History, and COVID

Celia Donert

WORKING from home is often seen as a flexible way to combine family and employment. It was already a fact of life for many academics. Yet during the pandemic, women with caring responsibilities reported a much greater loss of research time than men.[1] Over the past year, the pressures of teaching, research, and administration have been compounded by the obligations of home-schooling, cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. Domestic responsibilities intruded into the professional picture like a pet cat walking uninvited across the screen during an online meeting. We might all have a room of our own these days, even it's only a Zoom room, but which of us has time to write in it?

Because much of my current research focuses on the history of women's rights in twentieth-century central Europe, there is an odd sense of familiarity about this predicament. After all, these struggles over lost time are rooted in a long history of social and labor market policies based around gendered notions of breadwinners and homemakers, not least in central Europe, parts of which were the last on the continent to shift from a "half-day" to a "full-day" model of public education and childcare.[2] Underlying the half-day model was the assumption that children are best cared for by their mothers, at home; the pandemic has demonstrated how quickly and easily we fall back into these assumptions about the division of roles within the family. During the lockdowns, women spent an average of sixty-two hours per week caring for children, compared with thirty-six hours for men.[3]

This loss of time seems more of an obstacle to my own research than the impossibility of visiting archives in Berlin or Prague, although the closure of archives and borders has undoubtedly highlighted the centrality of travel and collaboration to the increasingly transnational field of modern European history. As the mother of two school-age children, I have seen the time available for research vanish, as schools shut their doors and the complex infrastructure of formal and informal childcare—holiday camps and afterschool clubs, as well as playdates and trips to the grandparents—suddenly disappeared. In some ways, this was less important than in normal times because I wasn't having to leave the house for teaching or meetings. And the shift to Zoom also enabled me to attend seminars in the evening without having to make complicated childcare arrangements. Yet trying to fit in a day of home-schooling and a day of teaching into the same twenty-four hours was impossible. At the same time, students were scattered around the world, trying to study from bedrooms without proper access to libraries, sport, friends or fun. PhD students were struggling to finish their dissertations; postdoctoral researchers were forced to change their carefully thought-out

[1]"The Career Cost of COVID-19 to Female Researchers, and How Science Should Respond," *Nature*, July 20, 2020.

[2]Karen Hagemann, "Between Ideology and Economy: The 'Time Politics' of Child Care and Public Education in the Two Germanys," *Social Politics* 13, no. 2 (2006): 217–60.

[3]European Commission, "2021 Report on Gender Equality in the EU," European Platform of Women Scientists, 19–21, https://epws.org/eu-2021-report-on-gender-equality/.

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travel plans. These were not minor problems. They affected people's plans for the future in terms of career and family. Colleagues were stressed out; everyone was tired. In some ways, this generated a new sense of intellectual engagement and community, but I think for most people the sense of lost time was stronger. In a broader sense, this loss of time points to the structural inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

Mid-career academics in secure posts may well see their careers slow down as a result of the lost research time this year, but the problem is obviously far more severe for early career and precariously employed researchers. My own experience of the pandemic has been one of extreme privilege: I have a permanent position at a well-resourced British university. Yet female historians in British universities are more likely to be in temporary fixed-term or part-time posts, with more than 60 percent of full-time permanent posts—and nearly 74 percent of professorships—in History departments held by men. Well before the pandemic, the Royal Historical Society had identified a chronic culture of "overwork" throughout the sector, which was "gendered in its effects" and exacerbated by a "lack of support for caring responsibilities, which are still more likely to affect women." Almost all respondents reported working "a lot" in the evenings, most worked a lot on weekends (72.2 percent female; 56.2 percent male) and many often gave up annual leave (51.7 percent female; 37 percent male).[4] This culture of overwork and hyperproductivity is developing in a context of rapidly increasing inequality, which has been intensified as a result of the pandemic.

Gender is only one dimension of the structural inequalities in Britain that have been magnified by COVID-19, extending far beyond the walls of the university, but that could have a much greater long-term effect on the field of modern European history than the temporary closure of libraries and archives. A report by the British Academy recently observed that the virus, and the government response to it, has amplified "existing structural inequalities in income and wealth, socioeconomic inequalities in education and skills, and intergenerational inequalities."[5] These inequalities are also deeply embedded in the British educational system from the earliest years of a child's life until university. The huge difference in access to digital devices or the internet, to a quiet place to work at home, and to parental support and supervision has shone a light on the ugly gap separating the 7 percent of British children who attend a fee-paying school, and those who do not, as well as class divides within the state sector.[6] Such divides continue at university, with students from poorer families more likely to be living at home, and thus reporting greater disruptions to their university experience (in terms of the "life skills" gained through extracurricular activities that are so valued by employers, as well as their academic studies) and concerns about financial security now and in the future.[7] At the same time, the consequences of Brexit, exemplified by the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus academic exchange program and its replacement with the less

[4]Royal Historical Society, Second Gender Equality Report, November 6, 2018, https://royalhistsoc.org/genderreport2018/.

[5]The British Academy, *The COVID Decade: Understanding the Long-Term Societal Impacts of COVID-19*, 2021, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/.

[6]Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, *Learning in Lockdown* (Sutton Trust research brief, January 2021).

[7]Rebecca Montacute, Erica Holt-White, *COVID-19 and the University Experience* (Sutton Trust research brief, February 2021).

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generously funded Turing scheme, are likely to mean that only wealthier British families will be able to send their children to study in Europe in the future.

What is to be done? Genuinely collaborative research could flourish if physical travel becomes less essential to participating in international research projects. Hybrid formats for conferences and workshops could create a more inclusive model of academic community. Residential fellowships could be offered in alternative formats that would allow people with caring responsibilities to benefit from writing time without having to relocate their families. But digitized sources and Zoom are not the only answer. When travel resumes and archives reopen, it will be essential that all researchers, at every career stage, can access funds for research without having to make complicated and time-consuming external grant applications. The pandemic has also shown that we can win back time by reducing the hours spent in committee meetings, cutting back on travel, or enabling some work to be done from home. Stepping back from the unrealistic expectations inherent in the academic culture of overwork might help to recalibrate the balance between what is possible in the time available and the criteria for hiring and promotions in the field of modern European history.

Historians of central Europe might already be particularly well prepared for the intellectual and conceptual challenges of historicizing pandemic politics. The turn to transnational and global histories of central Europe over the last thirty years has illuminated the dilemmas faced by small countries, vulnerable to the power games of empires and great powers, in negotiating projects of state-building in the face of cross-border phenomena such as globalization, migration, or disease. All these projects reshaped the "time politics" of work and care. Our challenge as historians might be to be more attentive to those connections in the past while doing what we can to sustain a humane academic culture in our universities in the future, once we are finally released from the Zoom room.

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Modern European History in Its Institutional Contexts: How We Got Here and What Comes Next

Andrew Denning

HISTORICAL change, to paraphrase Ernest Hemingway, happens two ways: gradually, and then suddenly. As I write this in my home office in December 2020, I am flanked by my daughter, a virtual first-grader, while our pandemic puppy, Gretchen, wrestles with our curmudgeonly older dog, Strudel. That such a tableau would have been unimaginable a year ago makes me hesitant to make definitive pronouncements about the state of our field. Nevertheless, as historians we traffic in multi-causal explanations, diagnosing gradual structural shifts that unfurl slowly over decades before a seemingly sudden and unexpected event—Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo, Günter Schabowski's televised slip of the tongue in East Berlin—becomes a historical pivot, delineating a "before" and an "after." For historians of modern Europe based in North America, where the teaching of our field is not so intertwined with nationalism, civics, and geopolitics as it is in continental Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic will mark a definitive shift in the ways we research, teach, and engage the public. COVID-19 will not be the *cause* of the transformation; rather, it will cement gradual changes in historical practice and institutional structures that have developed in recent decades.

First, some context. The post–World War II "normal" for which academic historians pine was in fact an educational bubble. In the United States, more than 16 million individuals served in the armed forces during the war, and they returned to plum educational benefits in the form of the 1944 GI Bill. Access expanded not only for the white working class, but women and people of color attended colleges and universities in much higher numbers in the decades after World War II. Meanwhile, the federal government poured money into public institutions, fueled by the postwar economic boom and the heightened tensions of the Cold War.[1] The Iron Curtain scythed through central and eastern Europe, making the study of modern European history a matter of contemporary interest. Defining and defending "Western civilization" was at once a political and an intellectual project that buoyed the fortunes of European historians for decades.[2]

The institutional structures of our field bear the imprint of postwar politics. The single North American journal encompassing all of modern Europe, *The Journal of Modern History*, began publishing in 1929, but the bulk of the journals and professional societies associated with our field formed after 1945. Most organizations formed in an interdisciplinary, "area studies" framework, incorporating history, languages, literary and cultural studies, and political science. Journals and organizations alike remained limited to discrete

[1] Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 13–15, 39, 84–85. My thanks to Professor Bailey for sharing her expertise on this topic in conversation.

[2] Indeed, a sequence in "Western traditions" remained a general education requirement for my undergraduate degree at the public University of Nevada in the early 2000s.

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ethno-linguistic and national spaces.[3] This area studies approach was itself shaped by geopolitical developments. Through Title VI of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, the US federal government underwrote the hiring of historians, linguists, and political scientists, and Title VI National Resource Centers served as intellectual incubators and sources of funding well into the eighties.

The year 1989 emerged as a turning point not only for European history, but for scholars and students of it. When the Berlin Wall fell and socialist states crumbled, experts in European history were in high demand … until they weren't. In the nineties, geopolitical focus moved away from the heart of Europe to the South China Sea, the Middle East, and the legacy states of the USSR, and the funding priorities of the federal government migrated with it. Long the locus of political frictions that escalated to continental and global conflict, European politics became stable and, to many outside observers, boring. For those who lived through Europe's combustible twentieth century, this was a triumph. For the scholars who made a living studying Europe, the end of the Cold War was more ambiguous. A generation of students who witnessed the collapse of communism developed an abiding interest in European history; later generations would only learn of that drama secondhand.[4]

American academic institutions changed as well after the Cold War. When undergraduate enrollments stagnated in the 1990s, universities spent more money on administration and capital projects to transform higher education in response to the imagined needs of the twenty-first century. Many universities, both public and private, developed a "market-driven" approach, altering undergraduate course requirements and shifting resources toward majors and academic departments in vocationally oriented fields such as accounting and kinesiology. Retirements of European historians left positions unfilled or consolidated. The study of European languages (Spanish excepted) declined at high schools and universities in the United States, and university administrators often used their budgetary scalpels to trim, combine, or even eliminate majors and departments in "underperforming" languages such as German, French, Italian, and Russian. As a result, fewer of today's students benefit from the simultaneous, synergistic study of history, language, and culture.

Nevertheless, despite various internal and external pressures, History PhDs awarded in the United States grew rapidly in the nineties, from a low of approximately 550 new degrees in 1989 to a peak of 1,050 in 1999.[5] At the same time, undergraduate majors in history have declined to historic lows as a percentage of all degrees awarded in the last decade. In European history, the ratio of PhDs to jobs has become increasingly skewed. In 2015–16, the average number of applications for a tenure-track job in European history was 132.7,

[3]What is now known as the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies formed in 1948; the Society for French Historical Studies was established in 1955; the North American Council for British Studies took shape in 1950; the German Studies Association appeared in 1976 (preceded by the Central European History Society in 1968).

[4]I was born in 1983; my first memory of a public event is news coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.

[5]They would approach 1,200 in 2013 before declining to just over 1,000 in 2019. Dylan Ruediger, "The 2020 AHA Jobs Report," *Perspectives on History*, February 12, 2020, https://www.historians.org/ahajobsreport2020.

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second only to positions in Latin American history.[6] An anecdotal survey of tenure-track positions at North American institutions for the catastrophic 2020–21 hiring cycle (as of December 2020) counts *three* on *any aspect* of modern European history. Stories about threats to humanities programs and faculty emerge daily as the fallout of COVID-19 on enrollments and university finances becomes clear.[7] It appears that administrators and regents across the country are not willing to wait to survey the postpandemic landscape, and instead are prepared to seize the opportunity of a financial and public health crisis to dabble in some creative destruction.[8]

Ours is a field in a state of contraction, if not in danger of extinction. Decades of change in history departments and higher education more generally have layered upon one another. In the coming years, we can expect the fallout of COVID-19 and decades of structural change in higher education to have uneven effects. Whereas most liberal arts colleges once had a modern European historian, they are no longer compulsory in our current geopolitical and budgetary contexts. Many institutions once boasted specialists of Russia, Germany, France, and Britain; in the coming years, we can expect consolidation of these positions to accelerate. Indeed, advertised positions in the last decade more often recruit for "modern Europe" than a specific national field. At elite research universities, having a strong contingent of modern European historians seems likely to remain common practice and a mark of distinction. The gap between the haves (the universities hosting DAAD professors and Max Kade Institutes, those with cohorts of graduate students and resources to support language training and overseas research) and the have-nots (those universities whose modern Europeanist faculty, graduate students, and course offerings will shrink, if not disappear entirely) will widen even further.

How are we to adapt to this new reality? How can modern European history survive, or even thrive, in the post-COVID-19 university? Our current generation of young faculty and graduate students show us the path. Their curiosity, worldliness, and mastery of languages make them far more ready than I was to undertake graduate study, conduct research, and engage the public. The very questions they ask and the methods they employ in their research and teaching have complemented national approaches with studies of transnational developments, of empire, of "Europe and the world." Further, as digital natives of the social media age, they are comfortable and engaging in historically informed, public-facing discussions of contemporary issues on both sides of the Atlantic, ranging from populist authoritarianism and cultures of public memory to the tensions between republican universalism and racialized imperial inheritances.[9]

[6]Robert B. Townsend and Emily Swafford, "Conflicting Signals in the Academic Job Market for History," *Perspectives on History*, January 9, 2017, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2017/conflicting-signals-in-the-academic-job-market-for-history.

[7]This includes a foreboding report in my local paper about threats to history departments at state institutions. Stephan Bisaha, "COVID-19 crisis could end history, chemistry, and math majors at some of Kansas' state universities," *Lawrence Journal-World*, December 28, 2020, https://www2.ljworld.com/news/state-region/2020/dec/28/covid-19-crisis-could-end-history-chemistry-and-math-majors-at-some-of-kansas-state-universities/.

[8]See, for example, permission from the Kansas Board of Regents to temporarily suspend tenure protections at state universities. Emma Pettit, "Kansas Regents Make It Easier to Dismiss Tenured Professors," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 21, 2021, https://www.chronicle.com/article/kansas-regents-allow-sped-up-dismissals-of-tenured-faculty-members.

[9]Recent work historicizing the complex genealogies of race, gender, identity, and belonging in modern Europe offer an excellent example of historians responding to—and shaping—contemporary discussions.

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To cultivate these scholars, we should step back and allow them to do what they are already doing well, but we should also rethink how we structure graduate training. For decades, the master's degree has fallen into abeyance, particularly at the large research universities where it has largely served as a waystation to the PhD. But as the academic market for modern Europeanists ebbs, we must reimagine how we train students beyond the bachelor's degree. In particular, we must create pathways for those with an abiding intellectual interest in the subject who might not wish to become university faculty. Today, this means connecting modern European history training with public history and digital history. In many programs, these areas are de facto, if not de jure, reserved for historians of the United States, with internships and opportunities for collaboration closely tied to liaisons with museums, archives, and businesses in the local community. But modern Europeanists can creatively develop such training opportunities and research outputs at our own institutions. For example, scholars and students at the University of Iowa scoured local archives to produce the "German Iowa and the Global Midwest" public humanities exhibit, which fostered local engagement while leveraging the expertise and training of modern Europeanist faculty and students.[10] We must forge and nurture local connections, demonstrating that our expertise offers more than boutique knowledge of faraway places and distant eras, but speaks to life in our communities in the here and now.

Finally, and most importantly, the exciting and important work undertaken by young scholars will mean little if we cannot address the history jobs crisis, which hits European historians particularly hard. Put bluntly, our professional organizations and the journals that represent the modern Europe fields are relics of the Cold War era, and there is no umbrella organization that speaks in the interest of modern European historians as a whole. Existing organizations remain vibrant and continue to serve our national and regional subfields well, but they have left modern Europeanists in North America without a forum for discussions on questions of common interest that cut across our splintered professional organizations. Even as we move toward transnational/continental/global questions in our teaching and research, no conference in North America gathers all modern Europeanists, and still only *The Journal of Modern History* publishes articles and reviews on topics from Iberia to Russia and from Scandinavia to Turkey (not to mention Europe's overseas engagements). Although it might seem counterintuitive, if not decadent, to imagine *new* organizations when our field is shrinking, we must create professional structures that speak for the modern Europeanist caucus with a unified voice, both within and increasingly beyond the academy.

In the interest of moving from critique to action, a group of scholars has created the Modern European History Collective to discuss issues of scholarly and professional interest to historians of modern Europe (broadly conceived in geographic and temporal terms) in North America. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted academic life in countless ways,

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See, for example, Nimisha Barton, *Reproductive Citizens: Gender, Immigration, and the State in Modern France, 1880–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Tiffany Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Robin Mitchell, *Venus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020); Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

[10] "German Iowa and the Global Midwest," http://germansiniowa.lib.uiowa.edu.

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but one salutary effect has been the proliferation of online academic assemblies of all types. As we have become more comfortable with holding academic meetings using videoconferencing software, the organizers of this collective agree that the time is ripe to begin conversations among modern European historians that do not require serious investments of time and money to attend distant conferences. Our goal is to serve modern European historians based in North America in their myriad forms: professionals at museums, editors at journals and presses, independent researchers, graduate and undergraduate students, adjunct and contingent faculty, and tenured and tenure-track colleagues at community colleges, liberal arts colleges, teaching-intensive institutions, and research universities. Although we are starting small with occasional research presentations, workshops, and discussions, we hope to create interest and momentum to produce lasting professional infrastructures that serve the needs of modern Europeanists of all stripes moving forward. In doing so, we might see the COVID-19 pandemic not as the beginning of the end of modern European history in North America, but rather an opportunity to forge new paths for our field.

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COVID-19 and Doing Modern European History in Japan

Mahon Murphy

The year 2020 was to be a triumphant year for Japan and the crowning achievement of Abe Shinzo's tenure as Japan's longest serving prime minister. Abe's touted "Abenomics" based on three arrows of monetary easing, fiscal stimulus, and neoliberal reforms were to be capped with a major success in the field of soft-power diplomacy, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The Olympics were postponed to summer 2021. At the time of writing, it seems likely that the games will happen in truncated form, sparing Tokyo the unenviable honor of hosting two "phantom Olympics"; the 1940 Olympics were canceled for very different reasons. The strain of managing the COVID-19 outbreak and a series of political scandals may have contributed to Prime Minister Abe's decision to step down in September. I will discuss my experience of the pandemic as a Japan-based historian working on central Europe (I am an associate professor at Kyoto University's Faculty of Law).

At the time of writing, Japan is experiencing a sharp third wave in COVID-19 cases that partly arose out of the ill-planned *Go to Travel* campaign whereby the Japanese government offered subsidies on domestic rail travel and hotel stays. This inevitably led to a swell in travel across the country and increases in infection rates outside the main metropolises, such as Tokyo and Osaka. A second state of emergency was declared at the beginning January but applied to only eleven out of Japan's forty-seven prefectures. International travel restrictions are more strictly enforced. Compared to my native Ireland, however, restrictions on daily life have so far been mild in Japan. Since spring 2020, classes at my university have been held online; however, we will begin the new academic year in April 2021 conducting a hybrid of online and in-person classes.

Working on European history from Japan can be a challenge and with travel restrictions in place it is even more so. Because the challenges of working in archives during the pandemic have been discussed elsewhere in this essay forum, I will instead focus on the social aspects of being a historian. Despite stereotyped images of historians as social shut-ins, we are a sociable bunch. We have been missing a vital cog in the development of any research: those chance encounters one has with other academics when attending conferences or working in archives. My own career path as an academic would have been vastly different were it not for a lunch invitation from a senior professor in 2011 when I was a PhD student. Having asked him for advice on sources for German prisoners of war in Japan during the First World War a year previous, the professor in question wanted to introduce me to a Japanese academic from Kyoto University who was visiting the United Kingdom for research. This meeting led to a postdoc opportunity and ultimately my current post.

Although not all chance encounters result in tenured positions, they are an essential part in developing research. Discussions over conference dinners or with a beer in the pub after a workshop are key aspects to where ideas are developed. Indeed, the online wave of nostalgia among historians for the varying quality of vending machine coffee in archive break rooms across Europe speaks to the importance of these moments of social interaction that have played an important if sometimes intangible role in the development of our research.

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The Japanese government's response to COVID-19 has not inspired confidence among the general population; it began with a badly handled attempt to quarantine passengers onboard the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship harbored in Yokohama. However, the crisis has reinvigorated public interest in history. As elsewhere, many Japanese have looked to the example of the influenza pandemic at the end of the First World War for lessons to be applied to the present. This has been a boon for me as a historian of the First World War and has contributed to a growing enthusiasm among my students for the period. The global nature of today's pandemic like its predecessor one hundred years ago has some valuable lessons for how we think of European history. Of course, we are well beyond the transnational turn at this stage in our discipline, but I do hope the pandemic will encourage a further integration of global and transnational history into European history. In a similar move to the current forum, the journal *gendai souzou* (*Modern Thought*, mainly dedicated to discussing current affairs) invited contributions across academia and the arts to discuss how the pandemic has affected our livelihoods with contributions from historians. Even though all of the contributors are Japanese, it remains a good example of a global and interdisciplinary approach to the study of the pandemic, ranging from analyses of Jared Diamond's views on the spread of disease to a rereading of Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot" against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

In other areas, previous Japanese handlings of natural and economic disasters have been revisited. In addition to studies of the "Spanish" influenza, responses to emergencies, such as the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, the Hanshin earthquake of 1995, and the firebombing of Tokyo in the Second World War, have been freshly analyzed in the context of the pandemic. With a more recent historical reference, public trust in the government's ability to handle the pandemic effectively was low due to its perceived failings in the wake of the Tohoku earthquake of March 2011. The failures of the Japanese government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) to provide accurate public information following the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in 2011 are now considered textbook examples of how not to manage a crisis.[2] In the approach to the tenth anniversary of the Tohoku earthquake, a powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake hit Tohoku, providing another unfortunate reminder of how much work needs to be done in the region.

For historians of central Europe, I hope that in terms of research, a postpandemic world will further incorporate global voices into the study of European history. One of the positive side effects of the pandemic has been the impressive growth of online conferences and discussion forums, which have made it much easier for me and my Japanese colleagues to participate. The acceptance of online forums for conference has the benefit of drastically cutting costs of attendance of international conferences. We have used it to good effect in workshops here in Japan, where we have to bring in voices from countries and institutions that would otherwise not have had the opportunity to attend. Credit must also be given to those publishers who have made their material available via open access or at discounted prices.

The current broader interest in the history of crises in Japan has been overshadowed by a political scandal. In October last year, a scandal broke out over then recently appointed Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide's refusal to appoint six of the 105 candidates to join the Science Council of Japan. These six, who are all engaged in research in the humanities and social

[1]現代思想2020年9月臨時増刊号 総特集=コロナ時代を生きるための60冊 44, no. 11 (2020).

[2]Azby Brown, "Information as the Key: Evaluating Japan's Response to COVID-19," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 18, issue 14, no. 11 (July 2020), https://apjjf.org/2020/14/Brown.html.

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sciences, had previously been critical of government policies. Suga's refusal to appoint them led to a national and international backlash in defense of academic freedom. The council, established in 1949, has been a constant and successful voice of opposition to military technology research in Japanese universities. Prime Minister Suga has failed to give an adequate explanation for his refusal to appoint the six candidates. Appointment to the council had customarily been a formality. The six candidates had dissented from previous administration's policy initiatives such as the enactment of new security legislation, the state secrets protection law, and attempts to amend the constitution.[3]

The move drew criticism from academics within Japan as being a violation of the constitution and a threat to academic freedom. On November 6, 2020, hundreds of academic societies from across the country released a joint statement to condemn Prime Minister Suga's actions.[4] This statement was also released in English on December 2, receiving support from the wider international academic community. Historians were among the first to act, with the Japanese Historical Council issuing a statement on October 3 calling on the prime minister to rescind his decision. The International Science Council lent its voice in expressing concern for the future of the free and responsible practice of science in Japan.[5] The Japanese Historical Council's statement sees Suga's actions as enhancing recent trends in some government circles to "ignore and deny the meaning of humanities and social sciences." The Science Council plays a vital role in the preservation of historical sources and cultural materials as well as the control of public records.[6]

What the reaction to the Science Council scandal has highlighted is an encouraging sense of unity of academics across various disciplines and gives one confidence for how our work as historians can be further brought into a truly interdisciplinary realm. It is also an important defense of the humanities and social sciences, which in Japan and elsewhere are threatened.

In sum, 2020 was important year for Japan; along with a poor response as to how to handle the pandemic, it saw the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, a huge blow to the country's soft power image, and a threat to academic freedom that garnered unified condemnation from Japanese and international researchers. COVID-19 has doubtless severely disrupted our personal and professional lives, but we can find some positive transformations that I hope will carry over into a post-COVID-19 world. These discussions had already been acitve in our discipline. Historians have decried the profession's precarious labor practices and lack of funding and career opportunities, but it has been encouraging to see more open online discussions. Those of us fortunate enough to be in secure positions, such as myself, should support the next generation of scholars who are doing their best to progress in what are difficult times.

[3]"Editorial: Suga's Science Council Meddling Puts Academic Freedom at Risk," *The Asahi Shimbun*, October 3, 2020, http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13784232.

[4]Kitano Ryuichi, "Academic Groups Shine Global Spotlight on Suga's Rejections," *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 3, 2020, http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13985390.

[5]For the statement of the International Science Council see https://council.science/current/news/statement-on-scientific-freedom-in-japan/.

[6]For a link to an English version of statement by the Japanese Historical Council, see http://www.nichirekikyo.com/statement/joint_statement_en_20201202.html.

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The COVID-19 Diaries: An Interview

Michelle R. Moyd and Dominique Kirchner Reill

HISTORIANS love dates, but nonetheless I can't pinpoint when I started reading Professor Michelle Moyd's regular Facebook posts titled "COVID-19 Diaries." Time in this nightmare has been something I have not wanted to fully experience. And I guess that is why I was so interested that this colleague, whose work I admire, was going out of her way to "mark time" while I was trying to sleep through it. As the days, weeks, and months progressed, I found myself reading her posts with ever more persistence, partially because much of what she discussed I was struggling with as well: the pressures of work while feeling the hopelessness of global disease, systemic corruption, administrative tone-deafness, and racism. But I also read her posts because of how different her experiences were from mine. I am a middle-aged, white, single woman, a professor's brat galore who was raised amid long dinner parties where guests talked about the German Enlightenment. Professor Moyd is more or less my age, the child of an African American father and a white British mother, where the "family business" was not academia but the military. She has a husband, a young child, and an adult stepdaughter. I work at a small, elite private university in a big, urban, multilingual city surrounded by beaches, alligators, strip malls, and Trump supporters. She works for one of the United States's largest and most prominent public universities, set in a small town in the Midwestern state that elected Mike Pence into public office. We are both historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We both study worlds where having been raised speaking German has helped us. Her "job" includes everything I do, but with much more: more levels of community activism, administrative responsibilities, and far more students to foster. All to say, reading Professor Moyd's COVID-19 Diaries gave me a sense of common experience and startling moments of recognition of how different our presents and futures are because of how COVID-19 has afflicted every aspect of our worlds. For this forum, I reread the more than 300 posts that popped up on my telephone every morning throughout this pandemic. I interviewed her in late December 2020 about what her COVID-19 Diaries say about what this crisis has done to transform our fears, passions, profession, expectations, and the possibilities of making history. Here are some of the questions I asked and some of the answers she gave, with excerpts from the diary.

*Day 1: First words of first post, March 16, 2020: *Where the Wild Things Are* puppet show on YouTube and me thinking about crocheting*

DR: What possessed you to start the COVID-19 Diaries? Why did you make it public, yet so raw and personal? Why did you choose Facebook as the platform?

MM: What possessed me, I think, was the bizarre realization that we were going into lockdown following an extended spring break at my university. We knew we weren't going to be coming back to in-person teaching and that we were going to be staying home. It hit me that this was going to be weird, different, difficult, perhaps catastrophic. I already had a pretty robust Facebook presence, but at some point, I transitioned into posting what I

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called the COVID-19 Diaries. There was something about the recognition of the experience being strange, with my child being at home all the time, my husband working in the next room, both of us preparing for this disconcerting experience of returning to work via Zoom, while at home with our child, after the students returned from spring break. And the inability to comprehend the impending catastrophe, but wanting to. The diary was a mental marker of all of that for me.

Facebook works for me because I'm not ready for the whole internet to be able to read whatever I post. The feedback I get there is less likely to be trolling. It's a contained environment that doesn't threaten me, where I can afford to be honest and vulnerable.

I never *decided* in any mechanical sense to make it raw or personal. In certain moments I felt something deeply, and threads of observations and analysis came together with that affect to produce some really sharp writing. In some ways then, the writing has expressed feelings that I wouldn't normally pull together in an academic essay. But they are indicative of how our emotions about teaching and scholarship are wrapped up in our everyday lives. The pandemic has heightened these dynamics in some obvious ways.

Day 103: It is always a risk putting writing out into the world, even in this curated space. I should be prepared for whatever comes back. But somehow I never am. It takes a toll, and it makes me question everything, especially why I am doing this. Especially when the struggle against all the things that need struggling against are so intractable, immovable, and retributive (or potentially so). For every high I feel when I find the words I want to convey how I feel and the seedlings of thoughts I am eager to share, there are the lows of learning that not everyone sees things the same way. At my low points, I wonder what difference it makes to keep putting writing out into the world. But there's no substance to that. It's antithetical to my life and my work.

DR: Did you post the COVID-19 Diaries for you or for "us"?

MM: Probably a little bit of both. I did have a sense of momentousness. There was something about buying all the stuff and preparing and all of that that felt adventuresome. And, of course, then the realization of what that meant set in, the uncertainty and dread of it all. I guess it was a way of solidifying bonds with a community I had already cultivated on Facebook. I could share some of my interior world, and get validation, criticisms, or questions, a bit of exchange. I know that people are reading it and that it matters to them.

People also told me that they appreciated my recording of textures and details of everyday pandemic existence that make up both the backdrop and substance of the crisis. The ordinariness within the catastrophe. Some readers have told me it made them feel less alone.

Day 40: . . . for the foreseeable future, all I can do is the bare minimum in this profession, and [considering] the implications of that for my career. My all-important career. COVID-19 is where ambition goes to die, along with so many other things. And this comes with the realization that people are dying, so who cares about ambition?

I will have to figure out what replaces it.

DR: On a personal note, it's been incredibly useful to me because a lot of what you describe is stuff that I'm living through, too, and reading about someone else going through it doesn't just make me feel less alone. It's that I start feeling protective about you. And then I'm like, why am I not being protective of myself around exactly the

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same things? It was very useful to me to feel about you the way I should have been feeling about myself.

MM: Yes. I will often reflect on a day or week gone by and make lists of things that I've done. This mental notetaking reminds me that I *have* done things. And that, too, seems to draw people in, in part because people are cheering me on. But also, as you just described, it gives people a touchstone for where the time goes. People also get to see into the life of a middle-aged professor struggling with significant professional and caregiving responsibilities. The pandemic has it all, and my Diaries do, too.

Day 60: Future work . . . feels out of reach. I want to not care, since I have the luxury of being at home, safe, with family and financial security. And then I get mad for not trying harder. And then I get mad for trying hard and not making progress. And then I just yell, "I quit," using my inside voice.

DR: A lot of posts address feelings of insecurity, about where you should be, where you want to be, what you're not doing that you expect of yourself. I'm wondering if you notice that this stuff is much more linked to age groups, gender, race, class, or if it's the inherent beast of our system of evaluation and expectation, which I think often is completely unrealistic.

MM: I felt insecure before the pandemic for sure. I had feelings of inadequacy about progress toward the next big research monograph, which isn't progressing. What hit me over the summer was *despair* about not ever being able to return to research. It felt like we were going to be stuck in this urgent loop of service-teaching-service-teaching-service-teaching, with both being driven by this complex knot of issues around care, and then compounded by racist terror in the United States. I, along with many historians, had this deep foreboding sense that this is *it*.

The combination of COVID and its attendant difficulties for everybody weighs alongside violence against protestors, the constant reminders of the expendability of Black life here and globally. Being a scholar seemed trivial. People are dying because they have to work in places where they don't have adequate protections. And I have the privilege of staying at home to work. And yet—as somebody whose identity is wrapped up in her research—the sense of wonder of stumbling across a new source, or a bit of history that I didn't know anything about, and its implications for my little corner of a world of research—all of that felt lost, perhaps irretrievably. Along with that there was also the ever-present feeling that I'm never going to get another book done. As an ambitious person, I've had to recalibrate.

Day 101: From highways through cities, to facial recognition software, to racial profiling, to extrajudicial police killings, to gentrification, to invisible standards, to demonization of Black people's bodies, on and on, through and through, so very much of what this country stands for is anti-Blackness.

DR: In rereading your Diaries, I was exhausted remembering everything we went through and we were still going through, and it was almost like I didn't know if the name "COVID-19 Diaries" is the right thing because I just remember crying so much about what was going on in the world. And it wasn't just the death, so it wasn't the pandemic, actually, it was the sense that over the summer and fall we lived through all the pain of a revolution, without going anywhere.

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MM: Those revelations also caused me to reckon more directly with my middle-class professional position. I have a great job. I have all the things. But the pandemic cracked open the fragility of it all. I had long been aware of how rotten the university's labor practices are for non-tenure-track faculty and graduate students, but my understanding of the scale of their labor precarity sharpened during the pandemic as universities cut budgets and laid people off. And also, the rattling visceral recognition of what I knew about poverty and capitalism, those things are *happening* to people right now, as they always have. It all became a more direct and urgent experience of recognizing that we *should* all be in this together and that, if we don't get it together, we're not going to make it. New intellectual and affective capacities opened up for me around these labor questions, in part because of spending time with activists more frequently. And then there's the gendered nature of it all. We have all the evidence that shows women in our profession and every other profession have experienced all of this in entirely predictable ways, right? There's nothing new about the notion that women and Black folks disproportionately do service and care[giving] work that is simultaneously hypervisible and invisible. And then the pandemic exacerbates it, but it still remains both recognized and unrecognized. In starting to reckon with the university's part in perpetuating necropolitics, I also came to see the need and potential for being in solidarity with workers and poor folks, more concretely.

Day 127: In the last seven months—unbelievably only seven months—I have met and worked alongside the most incredible organizers and women who get shit done. And now in this crisis, I am also seeing a groundswell of organizing by women to bridge the chasms between our institution's lack of responses and the needs we all anticipate because we've been living with them since March. I am in awe. And I'm trying to keep up.

DR: I have many friends whose sabbatical was last spring, and almost all of them have young children. And, so, not only were archives closed and libraries closed and Interlibrary Loan (ILL) impossible, but they were homeschooling and administrations have indicated that they are not going to make up that time. There is a feeling of hopelessness and insecurity around, "Will there ever be research again?" And what I've been experiencing, especially in reading your diary posts, is how much all of this isn't just the shit that happens in a pandemic, but of how we can't ignore the system anymore. The system does not feel geared to promoting research.

MM: Well, it's geared to promote *some* research, but not all. I guess one of the things that has emerged out of this for me and many women scholars is that traditional ways of measuring progression through the ranks have to be rethought. It feels increasingly misguided to continue insisting on separate categories of research, teaching, and service for evaluative purposes. And that's not to say that people shouldn't still continue to be evaluated in those categories if they want. The question is how can we better capture what vast categories of scholars—women, Black folks, Indigenous folks, Latinx folks, disabled folks, queer folks, trans folks—are doing that doesn't "count" as research. Those conversations are happening with new energy, with new voices involved. So, it's a generative moment for sure. It'll be interesting to see what sticks.

Day 82: It's the unsettled and unsettling feeling that all of this is familiar and that we have good reason to know what the worst outcomes could be because they are already happening, but also that there are potentials, alternatives, other visions. As [Ariella Aïsha] Azoulay tells us, we can, and must, unlearn imperialism.

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DR: Going back to the "COVID-19 Diaries." I was always happy when you would talk about readings you were doing that were inspiring you. Some were new, some you'd read before. I'm just going to name some, though you mentioned many, many more: Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger," James Baldwin's "The Devil Finds Work," Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus*, Azoulay's *Potential History*, bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress*, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore's speech "What is to be done?"[41] Would you have felt the same level of inspiration at any time or is the pandemic creating a thirst for these readings? And, relatedly, do you think your work is going to be different now?

MM: The pandemic has authorized me to read in targeted ways that I would have felt guilty about before. My overall research focus has certainly shifted. My primary body of research is about African soldiers who fought in the German colonial army, so I've spent two decades now thinking about how men do violence, how they participate in the making of the state, and what mattered to them. Right now, I'm more compelled to study the people who fought back. What happens when people see no other option but to move to active protest, revolution, and risking everything for justice and liberation? I'm looking particularly at an anticolonial war that was fought in Tanzania in 1905 to 1907 called Maji Maji, which was rooted in local and regional practices around health, healing, and the land, and conveyed by a religious prophet. I'm obviously not the first person to find this really compelling, or the first to write about resistance. A whole generation of African scholars wrote about resistance in the sixties and seventies. But I feel some urgency in thinking about what moves people to fight back. The initial spark for this was an invitation from Matthew Fitzpatrick to participate in a panel on German colonialism and sovereignty at the 2019 meeting of the German Studies Association. Thanks to comments by our moderator, Andrew Zimmerman, I began looking to work in Indigenous studies and Black studies to help me frame that enduring experience of living with an illegitimate ruler, an invader, who refuses everything that matters to you, who steals from you, who abuses and kills your people. So that's what got me to *Mohawk Interruptus*. That's what brought me back to Baldwin. I've long been a fan of Azoulay's work—she is constantly imagining other ways of being in the world that aren't about extraction and theft. "Unlearning" is very much on my mind.

Day 248: This week, the African Studies Association. I served as a discussant for a panel of outstanding papers by three PhD candidates. Then I was part of a roundtable that had eighty-plus viewers and really generated one of the liveliest, most productive conversations about academia that I've heard in a while. I left feeling exhilarated. And better yet, others did too. Four Black scholars talking about being Black in African studies in the United States. I wish I could convey how restorative it was to be in their company and to see so many allies in the audience. Because inevitably, there were also cringeworthy moments, but it was easier to shrug them off knowing that we all had each others' backs.

DR: Total shift: I want to ask about African studies, your work, and what you think about how the pandemic will affect the field.

[41]James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (Vintage International, 2011); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Dunham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2019); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "What is to be done?" *American Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2011): 245–65.

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MM: African history may be reshaped in substantive ways, and rightly so. One of the structural problems of this historical subfield is that it is dominated by white folks from the global north. African scholars in African institutions and in the diaspora are, however, creating their own spaces, networks, platforms, organizations, and conferences, as they always have. There is a very vocal and consistent rejection of the global north as the epicenter of knowledge production about the continent. As a Black person in the United States who studies Africa, I'm grappling with my place in this reckoning. For my part, I don't need to go to the continent to continue writing. I would like to get back to traveling to learn from and be in the company of scholars based in Africa, who are producing knowledge about Africa and Africans. But I'm also asking what it means to be a US-based historian of Africa right now and how I can stop participating in harmful practices that perpetuate inequalities.

As for the nuts and bolts? I have enough stuff that I collected from when I was a graduate student to write for the rest of my life. I've long worked on sources like memoirs that people in my field tend to think of as unreliable—more unreliable than other sources—but they are easily accessible, and there are so many of them. I will continue using them because I think this method brings a different perspective to how we do history. But honestly, the questions that I started asking over twenty years ago about the askari are still the questions that animate me. And, so, after two decades of studying the askari as a historian of Africa, I am now asking similar questions about the history of Black troops in the United States. This is research I can do without feeling as fraught about the conundrum of being a historian of Africa in a place that is responsible for institutional knowledge production about the continent that often excludes Africans themselves. It also uses the work I've already done, and so might add some fresh insights to US history.

Day 46: I suppose that what is happening is that I am doing a new kind of homework, working my way slowly toward and through the methodologies and frameworks that I skipped over when I shifted from being someone primarily focused on European studies to becoming focused on African studies. The binary has always been a problem. The promise of interdisciplinarity, of being willing to think through and incorporate new disciplines, subfields, genres, places, times. That's what's driving me right now, as my mind churns through the embodied experience of being a child of empire.

DR: Do you think you're going to work more on Germany in the future?

MM: I have some older projects I'd like to return to on Blackness in German culture and how certain kinds of images recur detached from their historical contexts and used for particular political, economic, and cultural purposes. Obviously, the figure of the askari is one. I've long been fascinated by how that figure works alongside, say, the image of the African troops in the Rheinland occupation. And that's not new—lots of people have written on this. But I would love to do some new work on visual culture that might contribute to the growing body of work being done by folks like Tiffany Florvil and Kira Thurman on Black Germany and Black Europe, building on generations of scholars before them. I can continue supporting scholars who are doing this vital new critical work that challenges continuing refusals to consider German colonialism as an essential part of German history. I'm at that intersection, and so I can help scholars become more attentive to how they're using Africa and the Diaspora in their work.

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