Omer



# “Mom! Dad! Wash your hands.”

## Canada, 20 March – 17 June 2020

*I live in the Pacific North-West in Vancouver, British Columbia, with John and our cat. I teach at a university, and John is an artist. I have family in Pakistan, and therefore, you will often find my thoughts racing to them.*

**March 20th, 2020**

**D.I.Y. hand sanitizer**

In Vancouver, there is a shortage of hand sanitizers. Customers are being urged only to buy what they need and not to stockpile. The government has been reassuring Canadians that there is ample supply of essential items such as hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies, and the challenge has been to keep up the supply chain in light of a sudden surge in demand. The pharmacy closest to me gets a supply of hand sanitizers daily. Each customer is allowed to purchase a single bottle, and they are placed behind the cashier.

That night, a friend on Facebook shared a video on D.I.Y. hand sanitizer. I went out to the pharmacy to look for Aloe Vera gel and 99% isopropyl alcohol; they were also sold out.

**March 21st, 2020**

**The protection prayer**

Omer



My sister, who is a medical doctor and practices in the Middle East sent me the following WhatsApp message with an Islamic prayer for protection from the coronavirus:




The above image states that a religious man dreamed of the Prophet Mohammed, who gave him the following protection prayer from the virus. The prayer comprises

of reading two specific surahs (chapters) from the Quran three times each, and a particular Quranic verse 313 times. I texted her back to check if she is giving this prayer out to her patients, then she is also reminding them at the same time to continue taking all necessary precautions and following safety guidelines along with the prayer. She said, of course, she is.

Later that night, I read an article in the Telegraph about thousands of Muslims coming together in Bangladesh to pray healing verses from the Quran. I also read how the Chief Minister of the Punjab province in Pakistan had reassured religious clerics that mosques would not be closed down in the province.

**Grocery day**

Today was grocery day. I lined up outside Whole Foods, which is finally enforcing social distancing measures. Only a limited number of people are allowed in at any given time. When it was my turn to enter, I first squirted some hand sanitizer on my hands and then used a disinfectant wipe to clean my hand-held basket. I then proceeded to shop. Despite limiting customers, there were still a lot of people there. It was impossible to maintain a 6 feet distance between other people. I got what I wanted and lined up for the cashier. The floor was marked with yellow tape to signal customers to stand at a distance from the next person at the checkout. I paid by tapping my credit card as I didn't want to touch the credit card machine. Upon leaving, I squirted some more hand sanitizer. When I got home, I first took off my shoes and washed my hands with soap. I then sprayed some disinfectant at the bottom of my shoes and rewashed my hands. I carried my grocery bag to the kitchen and proceeded to wipe down each item with a disinfecting wipe before placing them in the cupboards or the fridge. I then washed all vegetables and fruits with soapy water. I washed my hands with soap again. I wondered if I was crazy or if the precautions I was taking were necessary. Better to be safe than sorry, I shrugged.

**“Alive with bad hair, then dead with a fabulous hairdo.”**

I was just walking around the block; I felt a bit nutty from staying all day indoors. Across the street, I saw my 80-year-old neighbor step out of her car. I waived at her, “What are you doing out?” I said. John and I have been delivering groceries to her for the past several days, along with her drop-in care worker. My neighbor has been undergoing chemotherapy over the last year and is immunosuppressed. She shrugged, pointing at a closed shop: “I am here to check on my hairdresser. I called them, but they are closed. So, I am now going to drop a note asking them if they can come to my apartment to cut my hair.” Today was the first day that the city had ordered the closure of all personal services.

When I got home, I told John who I had bumped into. He phoned our neighbor, “Janet, we prefer to see you alive with bad hair, then dead with a fabulous hairdo.”

**March 22nd, 2020**

**“Mom, Dad, wash your hands.”**

At 6 am, half-asleep, I felt the urge to check the global numbers of the virus. I refreshed the worldometer page, which remains open forever on my phone. The global numbers were well over 300,000. My first instinct was to check Canada, where I live, only 98 new cases since yesterday. Then I quickly searched for Pakistan, where my parents live. Pakistan was at 6; the numbers were steadily rising. I googled to see whether Pakistan was considering lockdown and was slightly relieved to read that some parts of the country were indeed going under lockdown over the next 24 hours for a few days. The country’s President, however, said in his most recent speech that the entire country could not shut down as Pakistan is already facing

tough economic times. Instead, he encouraged everyone to stay home 'as much as possible.' At least the conversation was slowly shifting.

I impulsively phoned my parents to try to urge them both to stay home, practice social distancing and religiously wash their hands, messages that were being drilled into Canadians on a daily basis and with increasing urgency. My dad didn't sound too concerned; he was of the view that the sun will kill the virus and that there were only a handful of cases in the city where they lived. I reminded him that there is no evidence that the sun actually kills the virus, and if it did neighbor, Iran wouldn't be in so much trouble. Then I reminded him that reported case numbers only indicate the presence of the virus, not the severity of it and that the virus was extremely contagious, and many people won't show any or only mild symptoms. My mother, on the other hand, was much more receptive. She had purchased a supply of hand sanitizer and facemasks, and canceled her classes for the next two weeks. She runs a small afternoon Quran school for children in a highly dense informal settlement in the city. Mum did sound a bit worried.  I reminded them both not to touch their mouth, nose, or eyes when outside and to wash their hands before touching anything. I then forwarded them the handwashing video made by the, WHO which has been circulating through WhatsApp the last few days. We watched it together while on the phone. My mother was surprised how meticulously the women in the video washed her hands. Before hanging up, I reminded them, both "Mom, Dad, wash your hands."

**March 23rd, 2020**

**White aggression or pandemic fear?**

I used the receipt I got from the grocery store to push open the door as I didn't want to touch any surfaces unnecessarily. I held onto the paper receipt from its edge,

looking for a trash bin to throw it in. As I walked home, I noticed a large recycling bin in the back alley adjacent to an apartment building. It seemed to be full of flattened cardboard. I gingerly tossed the receipt into the bin, not wanting to touch the part of the paper that I used to push open the grocery store door. As I continued to walk, I locked eyes with a white woman dressed in black technical running gear and holding a sports bottle. "Do you know that is a cardboard bin?" she asked. I shrugged, not fully grasping what she said. She repeated, "That's my cardboard bin, asshole!" and briskly walked away, disappearing behind the bin into her apartment.

I was a bit stunned. Was she mad because I threw in some crumpled paper into a recycling bin meant only for flatted cardboard? Vancouver is full of recycling warriors. Or was it just white aggression? I couldn't figure it out.

As I walked home, I realized perhaps from a distance; it looked as if I was awkwardly holding onto a used Kleenex (tissue paper) as opposed to a crumpled piece of paper. Perhaps the woman thought that I threw in a possibly infectious Kleenex into her recycling bin?

**Ethnography in a post-corona world**

Today I received a rather alarming message from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, regarding the outcome of a fieldwork grant I had applied for:

"Dear Stage Two Applicants,
We are contacting you with important news about the current review season. I'm sure you have been following the rapidly changing situation related to COVID-19. There is no part of the world unaffected by this disease. None of your projects will turn out exactly as you might have expected when you submitted your proposal at the November 1st, 2019 deadline. We have no way of predicting what the world will look like in July 2020, when some of you were planning to begin your research. We

only know it will be different than it was before this crisis hit. For this reason, we have decided to postpone our review of proposals in the Dissertation Fieldwork and Post-PhD Research grant programs. Our reviewers will submit their evaluations in August 2020. The results will be posted in October 2020.

Those of you who made it to Stage Two have already done the hard work of putting together an excellent application. We owe you a response. We are asking our reviewers to evaluate your proposals in light of the times in which you wrote them. In August 2020, we'll have a better sense of the impact of the pandemic. At that point, we will be able to consider our reviewers' feedback and ratings and determine which, if any, of your projects to fund. We expect the number of awards we give to be very small. But you will receive feedback on your application. And you will be welcome to re-apply at the November 1st, 2020 deadline if you are able to develop a project that you can safely and ethically undertake.

We are working very hard at the Foundation to respond to the current situation and would like to share this information with you. Our first priority has been to reach out to our active grantees. We are doing everything we can to protect them and the communities affected by their work. We have asked our Dissertation Fieldwork, Post-PhD Research Grant, and Engaged Anthropology grant recipients to suspend all activities involving face-to-face contact. Some need our help to evacuate from the field; others are stranded and need support to remain where they are. Few will be able to complete their project in the form it initially took.

Now we are turning to upcoming grant application seasons. We will not be accepting applications for Dissertation Fieldwork and Post-PhD research grants at the May 1st, 2020 deadline. The next deadline will be November 1st, 2020, and it is likely to attract proposals for projects that are radically different from what we've seen before. Conventional fieldwork is the opposite of social distancing. We are unable to fund this kind of work at this time.

Even as we pull back from some programs, we are renewing our commitment to others. At the May 1st, 2020 deadline, we will still be accepting applications for the Hunt Postdoctoral Fellowship, which we are planning to expand. There will be more

awards for postdoctoral researchers, and there is a strong possibility we will add a temporary version targeted at dissertation writers, as well. We are also proceeding with the launch of our Global Initiatives Program, which will provide funding for projects not covered by any of our other programs. We'll be publicizing these measures soon.
Thank you for your patience with this long message. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at xxx. Now more than ever, the world needs the perspectives anthropology has to offer. However, this process unfolds, it's truly an honor to learn about your work."

The message got me thinking about the future of ethnography and other types of community-based research. Will ethnography ever look the same? In the future, once all this is over, will the university and funding organizations permit ethnography as we know it? I felt a deep sadness as well as a sense of panic, thinking about spending time with my research communities dressed in a hazmat suit. I wondered if safety requirements in a post-corona world will add another layer of separation between myself and my interlocutors: me, the researcher wearing protective gear or, at minimum a face mask armed with hand sanitizer versus my interlocutors who don't even have adequate access to water to wash their hands.

**March 24th, 2020**

**Death and dying**

The number of COVID-19 cases in British Columbia has rapidly risen as the province increases testing. Our provincial health minister has warned that these numbers are expected to jump over the next several days.

John refused to step outside the apartment today. I told him that we are most likely going to be in lockdown for a while, and hence is it good to step out once a day for a

walk around the block or so. John said he didn't feel comfortable. "I have smoker's lungs," he sighed "if I catch the virus, I will most certainly die." I told him that even now, the chances of getting the virus and dying from it are probably lower than being in an automobile accident. Later on, I felt guilty for saying that as I had just made these probabilities up without actually doing the math. I just wanted him to have some perspective; that as long as we take the necessary precautions and continue social distancing, we should be ok.

"You know," John added, "we need to have a conversation about death. What if one of us goes?" I shrugged, not really wanting to have such a morbid conversation, but quickly realized that this is an important conversation to have. "Well, it's not like we will get sick and die the same day, there will surely be some time in-between." John shook his head, "Things move very quickly when you get sick, it will most likely be a matter of days. And then we will be apart; it's not like we will be visiting each other in the hospital." I told him that it is true, but also keep in mind that not everyone who catches the virus requires hospitalization, yet alone dies. Again, I just wanted him to have some perspective.

We talked about what will happen to the assets we individually own, who will take care of the cat if both of us die, and whether we want to be cremated or buried. I wasn't sure if people who die from COVID-19 were even allowed a burial. I know a public funeral was out of the question. Being Muslim, I wondered if I die from the virus will someone be allowed to perform my last rites as set out in the Islamic tradition? This includes bathing the dead. I looked up an article on Sound Vision written by the Muslim scholar and activist, Abdul Malik Mujahid on these topics.

According to the article, about 25% of those who died in the U.K. from the virus are Muslims. At this moment, the U.K. parliament is considering a law that will cremate all dead bodies. With Germany allowing gatherings of only two people and Italy not allowing any funerals to take place, Muslim families, Masjids, and funeral homes are wondering about available options.

Unlike John, I don't want to be cremated.

The article also lists the following recommendations for taking care of the deceased body:

- Do not kiss or touch the body which has died from COVID-19.
- Those who wash the bodies of people who died from this virus must wear personal protective equipment (P.P.E.), such as disposable gowns, face shields or goggles, disposable gloves, and facemasks.
- After the preparation of the body, a thorough cleaning should be conducted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g. concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens are expected to be effective against COVID-19, based on data for harder to kill viruses.
- After removal of the personal protective equipment (P.P.E.), perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water must be used if the hands are visibly soiled. Hand sanitizers will not be enough.

I felt a deep sense of gloom reading the above. Not only is it strange to be alive in the times of COVID-19, dying from it, also, feels so unfamiliar.

**March 26th, 2020**

**The new normal**

The case count in Canada has crossed 4000.

Janet phoned Safeway (grocery store) and asked them if they have restocked flour. Flour is difficult to find these days. Luckily, they just did, and she asked them to save her a bag. We had to get some groceries and volunteered to pick the flour for her.

There was a long line-up outside; each store, each customer stood some six feet apart. It seemed social distancing was finally being taken more seriously. Finally, it was our turn to enter; only a certain number of people were allowed to enter at any given time. Upon entering, I noticed a sign saying, “disinfected baskets only.” The store was disinfecting its carts and baskets for customers. I picked up a basket; it was warm and slightly wet, perhaps these were steamed. The store was sparsely populated, and most people were doing a good job of staying apart from each other. We split up, and each picked up different items on our list so that our time in the store is shortened.

The cashier who checked us out wore latex gloves. I paid by Mastercard, instead of my usual American Express (AMEX), because AMEX doesn’t allow taps in Canada. I didn’t want to touch the credit card machine to enter my P.I.N.

Before leaving, John asked to speak with the store’s manager. The manager was a young man, probably in his mid to late twenties. John asked if they had considered adding some protection for the cashiers, such as placing a glass in front of their counter. The manager nodded and said that they had already placed orders for plexiglass cashier screens, and they will be arriving over the weekend for installation on Monday.

The night before, we had watched a video from a doctor in Michigan (U.S.A.) who gave tips on how to disinfect your groceries in these times of COVID-19. He suggested that we should treat COVID-19 as if it was glitter, and all our groceries were covered in it. Our aim is then to make sure we get rid of all the glitter and prevent it from going everywhere in the house. The doctor’s advice seemed excessive to me, but John was determined we follow his suggestions. After washing our hands, we placed the grocery bags on one side of the table. Then as before, we wiped down each item using disinfectant before putting them away and got rid of the shopping bags. John also washed the fruits and vegetables. I then cleaned the surface of the table using another disinfectant wipe. The entire trip, to the store and

back, and disinfecting all items, took nearly 3 hours. Buying groceries has become a significant task.




*Wiping groceries with disinfectant wipes. Image by author.*

Later in the evening, I went on Safeway's Canadian webpage to see what measures they were putting in place to promote social distancing and also to make their stores safer. I downloaded a flyer which stated the  following steps the store was following:

To protect our front-line heroes and our valued customers, over the last few days we have:

- Continued our nationwide rollout of plexiglass cashier screens

- Reinforced a robust and frequent cleaning program throughout stores
- Reinforced our already high sanitization standards for all teammates
- Early on, we closed all self-serve, café and bulk food areas
- Reduced hours to allow our teams more time to clean, restock and rest
- Reserved the first hour of the shopping day for those most vulnerable
- Continued to add floor markings and signage to our stores in order to promote social distancing

**7 pm**

Every evening at 7 pm, the time when shifts change at hospitals, residents of Vancouver come to their balconies or windows and clap and cheer in honor of healthcare workers. I went out on the balcony and joined others by also clapping and cheering. John played the singing bowl I brought back from Nepal. Right now, this feels like an important gesture.

**March 27th, 2020**

**Saving the world**

**https://www.tiktok.com/@kimj_nathan/video/6803792136698350854?u_code=0&preview_pb=0&language=en&timestamp=1585288962&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m**

**The world is a maze**

The outside world sometimes feels like a maze. People go out of their way to change their walk pathways if they see someone coming right at them. It feels as if brushing

past someone is a criminal activity that must be avoided at all times. Something like not being able to smoke in public places, or at the beach, or in a park. I read today on NPR that one should also avoid petting other people's pets.

I guess gestures like a smile, a wave, a loud hello, are currently the only permissible modes for expressing affection and acknowledging others.

Social distancing is *almost* beginning to feel very natural.

**2 meters apart**

Today, as I got into the elevator of my building, I noticed some new signage:

Omer






"Mom! Dad! Wash your hands."
https://boasblogs.org/curarecoronadiaries/mom-dad-wash-your-hands/

*New elevator signage. Image by author.*

**March 28th, 2020**

**Beer runs**

All liquor stores will now be closed on Sundays in the province of British Columbia, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. A couple who live down the hallway are known alcoholics, one of them more than the other. Judy phoned to ask if we could store her stash of "emergency beer" on our balcony, as she is afraid if her partner finds them, he will drink them in one day. Judy likes to have one beer a day, including on Sundays. She is worried about what will happen if the province decides to change rules further and keep liquor stores closed for more days in a week. John agreed to her request; I was annoyed at him for enabling substance abuse. He just shrugged. Judy dropped her beers in a large plastic bag outside our door. John gingerly picked them up using a disinfectant wipe and placed them in a corner on the balcony.

**Sniffles**

Today, the Canadian Prime Minister announced that people "showing" symptoms of COVID-19 can no longer board domestic flights or regional trains.

How will this be approached? Let's say; I have the sniffles from seasonal allergies, will I be denied boarding?

**March 29th, 2020**

**Frying pans**

My parents in Islamabad (Pakistan) have a maid who drops in everyday to clean the house, wash clothes, and perform any other outstanding chores. I have encouraged them to slowly wean her off as the city also moves towards a lockdown. Currently, the maid is coming in every three days as opposed to daily. She is requested to wear a surgical mask and wash her hands with soap upon entering. The maid has begged my mother not to lay her off, as she has already lost most of her other home visits due to people's concerns about the virus. Her husband, who is a daily wage laborer, is also currently out of work. The lockdown has proved to be very concerning for precariously employed people who earn minimum or subsistence wages.

On the phone, my mother explained that today she asked the maid to take some dirty frying pans home with her to wash and then bring them back to her thoroughly. I told my mother, that it is a terrible idea, given that the virus is supposed to last for up to 72 hours on metal surfaces. She got worried, "What should I do now?" she asked. I suggested one approach can be that the maid can keep the pans. Another is that when she brings them back, they are left outside in the sun for three days. After three days, they are washed with soap and water and then brought in.

**March 30th, 2020**

**Fatigue**

I have been feeling very tired today. Both my arms hurt, a continuous dull aching pain. I know this sometimes happens if I type awkwardly for too long on my laptop. I also have a runny nose and a scratchy throat. Since it is allergy season here in Vancouver, I am not sure what symptoms I am currently feeling.

Omer



Here in British Columbia, you cannot get tested for COVID-19 simply because you are feeling a little under the weather. The province has a self-assessment tool online. I decided to take it to see what it suggests.

The first question was:

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Severe difficulty breathing, (e.g., struggling to breathe or speaking in single words)
- Severe chest pain
- Having a tough time waking up
- Feeling confused
- Losing consciousness

I responded with a no. This took me to the second question:

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Mild to moderate shortness of breath
- Inability to lie down because of difficulty breathing
- Chronic health conditions that you are having difficulty managing because of difficulty breathing

I again responded with a negative. The next question came up:

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Fever
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Sore throat

I responded with an affirmative. The assessment tool then prompted the following instructions:

> “Please stay at home. As a precaution, the Ministry of Health is asking anyone with symptoms (fever, cough, sneezing, or sore throat) to stay home for ten days. If your symptoms worsen, call your family physician. If you are unable to reach your regular health care provider, call 8-1-1 to speak with HealthLink BC.”

The assessment tool then asked if I had a recent travel history or was in contact with someone who has travelled the past 14 days or with anyone else who is showing symptoms. I clicked no for all three.

The following concluding message was displayed:
“Please self-isolate for ten days. If your symptoms worsen, please check back in. Because you have (or had) symptoms, you should self-isolate for ten days. That means not going to any public places, staying at home, and not having any visitors. Don’t share personal items like dishes, utensils, or towels, and wash your hands often.

Please do not go to an emergency department, family doctor, or walk-in clinic unless your symptoms worsen. If you do need to visit an emergency department, family doctor, or walk-in clinic, please call ahead and tell them your symptoms, any international travel within 14 days, and whether you have had close contact with a

suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

If you need more information, go to BCCDC's COVID-19 website.

If your symptoms worsen, or if you are concerned, you can return to this self-assessment at any time; r, call 8-1-1 any time of the day or night."

I shrugged; will I self-isolate at home for ten days, knowing that most likely, I am suffering from seasonal allergies and a gradual setting in of malaise from a messed-up schedule? I thought I would sleep on it and decide in the morning. I did decide to skip my daily walk and opened up a bag of chips and lay down on the couch.

**Surgical masks from China**

Last week, I had ordered surgical masks from Walmart. They cost $50 for 50 masks and were to be shipped from China. The messaging on wearing masks is conflicting. According to the WHO, you should only wear them if you are feeling sick. But many countries around the world are suggesting their citizens always to wear a mask when leaving home. I think China, Taiwan, and South Korea are such examples.

The postman delivered them today. I picked the package up using a plastic bag and placed it outside on the deck. I thought I would leave it there for three days so that any possible virus on the package and inside the package would die away. Since the package was in transit for several days, I imagine any possible virus inside the package will be dead by now. Or is a virus capable of seeping through the exterior plastic wrap and the cardboard box? I suppose I could disinfect everything using a disinfectant wipe but didn't have enough energy to go through with the plan.

**Construction sites**

With the city under lockdown, it seems work on several construction sites is still ongoing. I watched a news clip about workers in Toronto who were claiming that they are all made to sign statements that they will be following all necessary precautions during work. The workers complained that this is just a mechanism to legally protect their employees, as it is impossible to take the necessary precautions on a construction site. For example, how can they maintain social distance or wash their hands every hour when there are no washing stations, one worker remarked. He said: “We should be allowed to stay home.”

A few days ago, several construction unions across Canada had called on the Canadian Prime Minister to suspend construction sites.

Site C is a controversial dam site in northern British Columbia that is being forcefully constructed on indigenous territories with prior free and informed consent. From various sources, I knew that the construction had not been halted despite the pandemic. I wrote to B.C. Hydro, the company in charge of the project through their website:

“Can you please let us know why construction on Site C has not been suspended due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak? Do you believe you are endangering the lives of your workers?”

Within an hour, I got the following response:

“Good afternoon Omer,

Thank you for your question regarding why we aren’t stopping Site C construction during the COVID pandemic and for expressing your concern for the welfare of Site C workers.

Our top priority on the Site C project will always be the safety of our employees, workers, and people living in the community.

We have been monitoring COVID-19 closely since January and have taken a number of actions at site as the situation has been evolving. On March 18th, we announced that we were scaling back construction work on the project to only focus on essential work and critical milestones, including work to achieve river diversion in fall 2020. This decision has reduced the number of workers staying at site and resulted in fewer traveling to and from Fort St. John. As of March 30th, there are 819 workers in camp. Under normal operations, we would typically see about 1,700 people staying in camp at this time of year.

At this time, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 at Site C. We're closely following the Ministry of Health guidelines, which currently require people that show symptoms of sneezing, sore throat, muscle aches, headaches, cough, fever or difficulty breathing to self-isolate for ten days. We're being very cautious with our application of the guidelines and asking people to self-isolate with any slight symptom.

For workers that still need to travel to site, our contractors are pre-screening their employees before they travel to camp. Any individual feeling any type of symptom stays home and does not travel to site. In addition, a pre-access screening consisting of the B.C. Ministry of Health COVID-19 self-assessment, along with a non-invasive temperature scan is necessary to access the construction site.

The Province of B.C. has provided clear guidance to large industry, operations (i.e., mining) and construction projects on how to operate during this time safely. For example:

- avoiding groups of more than 50 people;
- maintaining a distance of two meters from each other; and
- holding site meetings in open spaces or outside.

You may be interested in this news release the Province of B.C. issued on March 22nd that helps guides construction sites operating during COVID-19.

Additionally, we are following the recommendations of the Chief Mines Inspector that came out earlier this week from the Province of B.C., which include:

- Reducing the number of on-site personnel by encouraging work from home where feasible;
- Eliminating town hall meetings for groups of more than 50 people, instead communicating on site in smaller groups;
- Holding daily pre-shift safety meetings (toolbox meetings) in smaller numbers; and
- Reducing in-person meetings and other gatherings wherever possible.

Our focus remains on ensuring the safety of our workers and the public while work to meet critical milestones of the project continues. Any further decisions and additional measures will be based on direction by the health authorities and the province.

For your information we have posted 'Frequently Asked Questions' and project updates on our website here.

Best regards,

Site C Project Team

www.sitecproject.com

Apparently, the B.C. government has issued safety guidelines for construction sites that continue to be operational.  I can't understand why they aren't being halted, especially as the provincial government has been ramping up its messaging on staying at home and maintaining social distancing. I suspect a much deeper neoliberal calculus is at play.

I also read an open letter written last week to the provincial government on behalf of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs.

**March 31st, 2020**

**Takeout**

I am feeling a lot better today. My allergy medication seems to be working, and I don't feel as lethargic as yesterday. I guess I don't have COVID-19?

Today was the first time, ever since social distancing measures were put in place, that we ordered pizza for delivery. I googled a bunch of different pizza delivery joints, specifically looking for any information they may have posted on their webpage regarding extra precautions they are taking given the pandemic. Dominos seemed to be the only place with clear wording in this regard.

I placed the order with the following delivery instructions: "please buzz xxx when you arrive, and someone will come down to collect the order." I then proceeded to pay by credit card (including tip) online, so I don't have to use the delivery person's credit card machine or handle cash.

Upon arrival, the delivery person buzzed the intercom. John let them in through the intercom and told them that he would come down to collect the order. The delivery person placed the pizza on the shelf inside the apartment building and left. John donned on his outdoor shoes and jacket (we maintain separate shoes and jackets for outdoor use ever since social distancing kicked in), and I handed him a disinfectant wipe. A few minutes later in, he returned with the pizza. Without touching the box, I slid the pizza onto a plastic cutting board, and John placed the empty box outside on the deck to be thrown out later. I googled to see whether it is advisable to heat delivery food, just to be safe. What I understood from the results of my search was that there is no conclusive evidence about the linkages of the temperature of food and COVID-19 and that the virus is destroyed upon ingestion by our stomach acids. I put the pizza in the oven anyway, for 5 minutes at 400 Fahrenheit.




*The pizza box "airing" out on the balcony. Image by author.*

**The white pandemic**

The United Nations has declared the current pandemic as the worst crisis since World War II. I have severe reservations with this statement and spent the day thinking if this statement was made only because the Western world for a change has been placed at the center of a slowly unfolding tragedy. I was thinking about a recent piece I had read about the HIV/AIDS crisis and how long it took for that to be classified as a pandemic. I think according to 2018 estimates, there are some 38 million infected with H.I.V. globally. The piece stated that at least in the U.S., only

when the transmission and of H.I.V. was detected in straight people, that the government sounded the alarm. I also thought about Ebola and the very little traction it received internationally, other than it being the plague of Africans, and that too a particular kind of African.

I have also begun to take particular note of how vulnerability is being framed during the corona pandemic, with a lot of emphasis in the media being placed upon the elderly and those living in care homes. There is very little conversation about other kinds of intersectionalities, such as the homeless (Vancouver has a large homeless population), sex workers, at-risk youth including those from the LGBTQ community, recent immigrants, under-serviced First Nations communities, low-income households, etc. to name a few. Even the human-interest stories of those who have passed away or have recovered, to me, seem to be only about white people. The white grandparent, the alone elderly, seems to be the Canadian face of the pandemic.

**April 1st, 2020**

**Thinking of visiting mum and dad**

Every year around this time, I usually travel to Pakistan to visit my parents. This is usually when Ramadan (month of fasting for Muslims) starts. This year, Ramadan begins on approximately April 24th, depending on the moon sighting. As of today, there are no flights to Pakistan as the country has suspended all incoming and outgoing flights. There is some talk that they might resume towards the end of the week. I am following the situation closely. Currently, the Canadian government is discouraging all international and domestic travel, unless absolutely necessary. I also do not want to be taking the virus to my parents. I have some thinking to do. There are some rumors that if and when flights to Pakistan resume, all travelers will be

tested for the virus and possibly placed in quarantine upon arrival.

**L.N.G. worker tests positive for COVID-19**

It was on the news that a construction worker in an L.N.G. site (another ongoing and controversial mega-project) in Northern British Columbia has tested positive for the virus. The conversation around the construction site has still not radically shifted in the country.

**To mask or not**

I haven't gotten around to opening my box of surgical masks that I ordered from Walmart. They are still airing out on the balcony. But the debate, whether to mask or not, is getting increasing attention in the media. More and more experts in North America are recommending people to wear masks as long as the proven precautions are maintained, i.e., washing your hands, avoiding crowded places, and not touching your face, mouth, and eyes. The U.S., given the high rate of infections there, is considering revising its guidance on face masks. In Vancouver, the discourse is that the public should not be purchasing face masks and leave dwindling supplies for health workers. The province's Chief Medical Officer reiterated that today in her daily provincial COVID-19 news briefing. She went as far as to say that they don't even work. I find her comments on the ineffectiveness of face masks not convincing, as there is ample empirical evidence that they do indeed work when combined with other precautions. *Why has such a simple issue become so polarizing*?

**April 2nd, 2020**

**Change of heart?**

It looks like the B.C. provincial government is considering rethinking its stance on face masks. As I was heading to bed, I checked the CNN website to see what the numbers were like south of the border; I noticed the headline "The case for masks strengthens." Upon clicking on it, I was taken to an article detailing how the virus can be spread in aerosol form through breathing and even talking.

**April 3rd, 2020**

**Mask wars**

The entire mask issue seems to be getting more and more traction. Today, in his daily briefing Donald Trump announced that the C.D.C. recommends the use of "non-medical cloth" face coverings. I heard him say that people should wear a scarf or a bandana over their mouths and nose.

There also seems to be surprising disagreement between Canada and the U.S., 3 M (American company) which makes N95 respirators announced that they received a

request from the Trump administration to stop exporting N95 respirators to Canada and Latin America as demand grows in the U.S. The Canadian Prime Minister lashed out that this would be a violation of NAFTA (trade agreement) and that the U.S. should keep in mind that Canada exports a wide range of necessary medical raw materials to the U.S. The company (3M) is apparently pushing back and voicing concerns about the grave humanitarian repercussions of such a move, as it is a critical supplier of respirators to both Canada and Latin America.

I decided to finally open up my box of surgical masks that was still airing on the balcony. I tore open the box to find surgical masks in a plastic bag. I have placed

them on the dining table, still slightly uncertain about using them.



*Newly arrived surgical masks ordered from Walmart. Image by author.*

**April 4th, 2020**

**Ontario scales back on construction sites, but not British Columbia**

The province of Ontario announced yesterday that it was scaling back construction work in the province, and only allowing work on major infrastructure works.

Similar steps have not yet been taken in British Columbia. In fact, in today morning's

daily update, in response to a question from a caller, the province's chief health officer Dr.  Bonnie Henry stated that she is not concerned about the risk of spread in construction sites as risk can be easily mitigated there. This made me rather uncomfortable. She said that work on necessary sites and projects must continue so that the province is ready to receive and absorb the necessary infrastructure stimulus funding the federal government has in the pipeline for the province. This, to me, continues to be at odds with her messaging just moments earlier about social distancing, staying home, etc.

**The corona shrine**

We decided to place all our disinfectant essentials, which we need to access either upon leaving home or entering, on the shoe rack adjacent to the door.




*The corona shrine. Image by author.*

**Vaccine tests in Africa**

Apparently, two racist French doctors publicly stated on French television that the vaccine for COVID-19 should be first tested on people in Africa. According to this article, one of the doctors who heads the intensive care unit of a hospital in Paris stated:

"It may be provocative. Should we not do this study in Africa where there are no masks, no treatment, or intensive care, a little bit like it's been done for certain AIDS

studies, where among prostitutes, we try things because we know that they are highly exposed and don't protect themselves?"

To which the second doctor, a research director at France's national health institute, responded: "You are right. And by the way, we are thinking of in parallel about a study in Africa using this same approach."

Later today, another French T.V channel was criticized after one of its journalists was heard whispering "they are burying the Pokémon" during its coverage of China's day of mourning for coronavirus victims.

**April 6th, 2020**

**What is essential?**

An article on Al Jazeera today challenged what makes something "essential," i.e., what considerations go behind deciding which businesses/services/projects will continue despite the ongoing lockdown (or slowdown). The article questions why companies are still working on major resource extraction projects, such as oil and gas pipelines and hydroelectric dams, during the crisis. Indigenous leaders say a potential coronavirus outbreak among hundreds of workers deployed to build various projects could risk overwhelming local healthcare systems and put communities at heightened risk. They are talking in reference to the Site C project mentioned earlier.

**April 7th, 2020**

**Forever changes**

Today I visited the laundry room in our building for the first time since the lockdown has started. I noticed some new signage with important instructions. One, the signage stated that only one person can be in the laundry room at a time or two people if they live together. Second, the building management is in negotiation with the company that installs and maintains the laundry machines to switch over to a contactless credit payment system. Presently, tenants use coins to pay for the washers and dryers. I guess this will be a forever change that will last beyond the pandemic. I wore gloves while using the machines.

**April 8th, 2020**

**The worst are the runners**

Given the kind of city Vancouver is green, kale and rice bowl driven, but also weirdly hypocritical in its devotion to consumerism and the mining industry- there are a *lot* of runners in the street, even in the times of COVID-19.

They make me nervous; I take extra precaution to go out of my way when I see a runner heading in my direction. With all their heavy breathing and profuse sweating, I am not sure if runners understand how their innocent efforts at keeping themselves healthy, possibly put others at risk. Apparently, there is a Dutch-Belgian study out there on similar concerns.

**April 9th, 2020**

**The vulnerable are not just people in retirement homes**

So it finally happened: COVID-19 has been detected in the prison system here in British Columbia. This, to me, demands an important shift in the narrative of where

outbreaks have and can occur and who is the most vulnerable to the contagion. Similar outbreaks in the prison system have been detected elsewhere in the world also, e.g., in Pakistan. There have been several calls to release prisoners (at least those with minor offenses,) and some countries apparently have even done so; this includes Canada.

The virus was also detected in Vancouver's DTES community, a space called home by the city's large number of homeless and highly vulnerable residents.

I am hoping the question of vulnerability is opened up in the discourse in Canada and British Columbia specifically, where the conversation remains fixed around the elderly and those in long-term care facilities. It seems the government is unwilling to acknowledge its ongoing and chronic issues of homelessness, lack of affordable housing, poverty, and drug use (Vancouver was already in the midst of the opioid crisis before COVID-19).

To be fair, some measures have been taken in the DTES, but not enough. The face of the pandemic needs to prominently include other types of vulnerabilities – not just the seniors and the elderly.

**April 10th, 2020**

**Virtual Khutbahs**

Today is Friday. It is the day when Muslims visit mosques in the afternoon for congregation prayers, known as "Jumma" (which simply translates as Friday). An important component of these prayers is a sermon (known as the 'Khutbah') delivered by the mosque Imam.

Mosques all over the world are now closed, including the two most holy sites in the

world for Muslims; the Kaabah in Mecca (Saudi Arabia) and the Prophet's mosque in Madina (Saudi Arabia). Worshippers are discouraged from attending prayers in mosques, though some still defy these measures.

Mosques and prayer spaces are also closed here in Vancouver. There hasn't been a Jumma prayer, ever since social distancing measures were instituted here. I am beginning to miss my attendance; I used to pray every Friday afternoon in the community space in the basement of the Vancouver Public Library, which was attended by many Muslims working/living around/in the downtown core.

Today, I decided to listen to the Friday Khutbah online. It wasn't the same thing, but it was something.

Omer






“Mom! Dad! Wash your hands.”
https://boasblogs.org/curarecoronadiaries/mom-dad-wash-your-hands/

*Attending a virtual Khutbah this Friday. Image by author.*

**April 13th, 2020**

**Lockdown or not**

Islamabad, Pakistan, where my parents live has been under lockdown for the past two weeks. Today the Prime Minister is going to decide whether the country will continue being under lockdown or if there will be the resumption of some public and economic life. The main concern there, like most parts of the world, is the economy. However, the considerations and circumstances there are a lot different, for example, as compared to Canada: 212 million people, q dense population, poor public health infrastructure, and a large portion of people living below or near the poverty line. A culture that honors and celebrates community, family, and closeness also stands at odds with the current logic of social distancing. The number of COVID-19 positive cases is steadily rising in the country, and it is speculated that a big wave is yet to come.

Last night, I spent two hours on the phone, helping my mother place an online order for groceries. The service has become so popular over the last few weeks, that they take orders a week in advance. They also only open for a few hours every week before they hit full capacity. I constantly check on my phone to see if the service is open. Luckily, I was able to place the order before they closed for another week.

My parents will get their delivery on the 20th. We ordered most items in bulk so that they will not have to go grocery shopping too often between each delivery. My dad still thinks it is unnecessary, but we went ahead and placed the order anyway.

**April 15th, 2020**

**Subtle change in public messaging.**

When I called my parents today, I noticed that the public health messaging set by Pakistani health authorities to replace the ringtone was different. Previously the recording went as: "Coronavirus is a dangerous disease, but it is not life-threatening. Here are some ways to prevent getting sick…" (roughly). Today I noticed a subtle change in the recording "Coronavirus is a dangerous disease and *can become life-threatening*. Here are some ways…"

**The lockdown continues, almost.**

The Pakistani government has also decided to continue the lockdown for another two weeks, though, with some relaxation. Construction, fertilizer, agricultural goods, and import industry will be allowed to function with some conditions. Shopping malls, markets, cinema houses, sports stadiums, educational institutions, and public places will remain completely closed for the next two weeks, while shops of dry cleaners, electricians, plumbers, stationery, and hairdressers etc. will open under standard operating procedures (SoPs). These, the government claims, are in the best interest of the country's 212 million people.

Religious clerics are not on board with how restrictions are being envisioned for mosques, also given how Ramadan is fast approaching. Defying the government's instructions, a group of religious leaders and scholars in Karachi announced that mosques like banks and hospitals should also be considered as "essential services," and therefore, they will not allow the shutdown of mosques. They stated they were going ahead to open the mosques for congregational prayers and the lockdown restrictions would no longer apply to them, this includes daily congregation prayers (5 daily), the larger Friday prayers (once a week), as well as Tarawih prayers during

Ramadan (extended prayers held nightly throughout the month).

Taken from the article hyperlinked above:

He (cleric) called on people coming to mosques to observe precautions, including practicing social distancing, use sanitizers, wear masks, and perform ablution at their homes. Usmani instructed mosque administrators to remove rugs and carpets, clean floors, and ensure sanitizer and soaps available. “There must be proper space between the rows and among the people who pray.” He also asked the provincial government not to arrest people from the mosques. “All those arrested (for coming to mosques) should be released.”

Another cleric said that the lockdown was not applicable to mosques, and arrangements would be made for Friday prayers and Tarawih in Ramazan. He said the solution lay in seeking forgiveness from Allah and increasing attendance in mosques. He said that they want to tell the government that mosques should not be closed. He also criticized the police for using force against prayer leaders in the country. “The prayer leader’s job is to lead prayers, not to stop them.” He also demanded that bills of mosques and religious institutions should be waived.

**What do the numbers tell us**

What do the numbers actually tell us when we look at the number of test-positive cases of those that died from the coronavirus?

A very scary and somber news article from Pakistan details how hospitals in the city of Karachi have been receiving a large number of D.O.A. (dead on arrival) patients over the last two weeks. The story says that only a handful of the deceased are x-rayed to see if they died from a pneumonia-like disease, and a postpartum is rarely conducted. The story reads:

"Most likely causes of their deaths were 'severe illnesses' — ranging from chronic liver disease, multiple organ failure and cardiopulmonary arrest to renal failure, pneumonia, and even acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), added the officials. 'We started observing this trend by the end of last month when we saw that the number of patients requiring emergency treatment had declined from 1,800-2,000 to 600-700 a day,' said the critical care specialist at the JPMC. 'But the number of people who either were dead on arrival or died within a couple of hours after their arrival increased with every passing day. Initially, we didn't pay any heed, but now we see a pattern. And this is also being reported by other hospitals.'"

As of today, according to the COVID-19 dashboard maintained by the government of Pakistan, there are 6383 confirmed cases and 111 deaths in the country. An older news report states that suspected numbers in Pakistan exceed 12,000. There really is no way of knowing. I think more conversation is needed on what the number of "confirmed" cases actually donates, so people don't take these numbers lightly.

**April 17th, 2020**

**Masks during air travel**

The Canadian government has put in new rules that require air travelers to wear non-medical masks during transit. So, it seems that recommendations for wearing masks have finally arrived in Canada.

**April 18th, 2020**

**Social distancing in the countryside**

Today we decided to go to John's house up the coast in Powell River (small rural

town). We thought that the responsible thing to do would be to pack all the necessary groceries with us and not visit any stores in the town. So that is what we did. We hit the grocery store up the street and bought enough supplies for a week.

To get to Powell River, we have to drive up to the ferry terminal and take two ferries. At the first terminal, where customers have to pay, the operator asked us if we had any COVID-19 symptoms and whether we had traveled outside of Canada over the last two weeks. A poster on the ticket booth listed all COVID-19 symptoms. We replied with a negative. The ferry terminal was near empty. We estimated that the ferry load must be down by 70-80%.

We drove onto the ferry.  Usually, we exit our car and go up on the passenger deck. However, given the pandemic, we decided to stay in the car for the duration of the trip. Most people did the same, but I saw a few people making their way up to the deck. Once we docked, we drove straight to the second ferry terminal. We did not stop anywhere. The second terminal had just maybe 7-8 cars. We did the same on the second sailing: stayed in the car. Once we docked, we drove straight to the house.

We plan to be here for at least a week, possibly even longer.

**April 19th, 2020**

**Mosques and congregation prayers reopen in Pakistan**

It is official. Mosques have reopened in Pakistan despite rising test positive cases. Congregation prayers, including Friday prayers, have now resumed all over the country. It is said that Tarawih (special night prayers also in congregation) will also take place during the approach holy month of Ramadan.

This decision was made after religious groups reacted negatively to the Pakistani government's earlier directives at keeping mosques closed for another two weeks.

Apparently, the government has agreed on a 20-point S.O.P. (standard operating procedure) with mosque administrators. Mosques that violate them or fail to enforce the rules will be shut down. Some of the S.O.P.s, as mentioned in the article referenced above, include:

"Reading out the S.O.P., the President said all mosques would remove carpets and clean the floor. However, people would be allowed to bring their prayers mats from home. There will be no gathering after congregational prayers – including five times daily prayers, Friday prayers, and tarawih – prayers offered after Isha prayer in Ramazan.The prayers will preferably be offered in open courtyards of mosques or a garden. People over 50 years of age and children would not be allowed, and the worshipers during congregational prayers will stand at a 6-feet distance from each other, according to social distancing precaution prescribed by the World Health Organisation (WHO)."

The S.O.P. said Tarawih and other congregational prayers will not be conducted on roads, footpaths, and anywhere else other than mosques. It said mosques floors should be washed with chlorinated water regularly, and mosques would form committees to ensure people are abiding by the rules and S.O.P.s. It recommended painting markers on floors to ensure people follow social distancing rules. It also asked people to perform ablution at home, wear face masks in mosques, and avoid handshakes and hugging. Social media has erupted in a storm criticizing the government for this decision and succumbing to the pressure from religious groups.

This is indeed a strange move, as many Muslim majority countries have decided to keep their mosques closed. This includes Saudi Arabia, whose Grand Mufti, a religious scholar revered in the Muslim world including Pakistan, stated that visiting the mosque during the pandemic is equivalent to sin, given that it can cause

irreparable harm to life.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani government has extended its ban on international and domestic flights until Apr 30th. As of today, there are a total of 8418 test positive cases in Pakistan.

**April 21st, 2020**

**"We are an independent nation."**

There is growing criticism against the Pakistani government for reopening mosques and permitting congregation prayers. A group of doctors has written an open letter urging the government to reconsider. The government's response has been "that we are an independent nation," and therefore, cannot stop people from praying in the mosque, if they wish to do so. I find this very strange, as the Pakistani government historically has been very interested in policing what its citizens can and cannot do. Anyways, the current approach is towards regulation: allow people to attend mosques, if they wish, but only in line with established protocols such as social distancing while seating and deep cleaning of mosque premises.

**April 22nd, 2020**

**So, it happened**

The Pakistani Prime Minister has warned that if any mosque defies mandated social distancing protocols, it will be forced to shut down.

So, it happened, there was an outbreak detected in a mosque in Islamabad. The police rushed in to seal it.

Ramadan is starting in a few days. This is when attendance in mosques increases manifolds. How many outbreaks should we expect?

**April 26th, 2020**

**Grocery runs in a rural community**

We are still near Powell River, the small town up the coast of British Columbia. We are almost out of food and decided to venture into town to get some groceries. Till now, we have not visited any public places here. But since we have been here a week and have had no symptoms, we thought it might be ok to do so. The grocery stores here didn't look so different from the ones in Vancouver. Social distancing measures were in place, and only a limited number of shoppers were allowed to enter at any one point. Anyone entering had to take a shopping cart; it was clear to me if they were being disinfected after each use. I grabbed a trolley and entered. There was signage everywhere, and people were keeping a good distance. For a rural location with no test positive cases so far, this was impressive and comforting to see.

**Coronavirus and women's morality**

A well-known Pakistani religious personality recently made some controversial remarks on live television, where he equated the cause of the ongoing pandemic with women's immodesty. According to him, Pakistan is in the grip of the disease because its women have begun to dress immodestly and its private (elite) schooling system, which is misleading young people. His remarks have sparked rage and outcry amongst Pakistanis.

I find his comments dangerous for several reasons. First, it can possibly shift

attention away from social distancing practices to policing women's bodies, clothing, and morality. Second, it can spark reason for violence towards women. This is disheartening, given that the religious figure enjoys much respect and acceptance throughout the country. He made these remarks during a live telethon chaired by the Prime Minister of Pakistan who had invited him to lead a prayer for the country's well-being on the show.

Just yesterday, I also read an article on how health care workers in Mexico are being attacked because of the misconception that they are responsible for the outbreak. Who will be next? Women?

**May 9th, 2020**

**"We shall soon be able to see each other – with precaution, of course."**

I am still on the Sunshine Coast in rural British Columbia. It seems that the province has "flattened the curve," reporting some 30 cases per day. This weekend, parks and beaches in Vancouver are set to reopen. A friend shared a picture on Facebook showing hundreds of Vancouverites closely packing Kitsilano beach, a beach in my neighborhood. Another friend texted, saying: "We shall soon be able to meet each other – with precaution, of course." The BC Health Officer announced yesterday that the province is now ready to ease lockdown restrictions. I wonder what that will mean.

**May 20th, 2020**

**The masks are back**

Theresa Tam, Canada's chief medical officer, made a not so surprising

announcement today. She encouraged Canadians to wear masks “as an added layer of protection” whenever social distancing is not possible. Her announcement can be viewed here. This announcement comes at a time when many Canadian jurisdictions are reopening for some measured level of public life. Today is actually the second day of British Columbia’s “reopening.” I haven’t been out yet to see what the city of Vancouver now feels like; we are still up in rural British Columbia.

I haven’t checked if face masks are readily available in the market, but I still have my box of surgical masks procured from China a few weeks earlier.

As I was watching the announcement, I received an email from my hairdresser that they are reopening on June 2nd. The email was strange to read, as it offered unsettling glimpses of what the “new normal” will look like. I have copied the email below.

“To our wonderful and patient clients, we are going to be reopening both Attic Hair Studio and Undercroft Hair & Tattoo on June 2nd. Online booking is open now for Undercroft, and dates are available for Attic in July.

Please visit [...] to select your stylist and book an appointment. Also, note that we will not be able to accommodate walk-ins at this time. Appointments must be booked in advance. We will be answering the phone at both locations from June 2nd onwards, so please use our online tools to book in the meantime. After carefully reviewing the guidelines set out by WorkSafe BC we have decided on the following protocols and procedures, in an effort to keep you and our stylists happy, healthy, and safe.

- Clients and stylists will be required to wear masks at all times when inside the studio. Guests must bring their own mask. We have spent many hours sourcing masks for our team and will not be able to provide extras for clients, we can’t risk running out. We will not be able to make any exceptions to this rule as we are confident it will greatly reduce the chance of contamination inside the studio.
- We are asking that anyone feeling unwell in any way stays home. We will

have the ability to check temperatures in both Studios. Cancellation fees will be waived for the time being.
- We have installed plexiglass shields on our reception desks and have the option for contactless payments.
- We will have antibacterial soaps at all sinks and will be asking anyone entering the studio to wash their hands immediately.
- We will be limiting the number of stylists in the studio at any one time and spreading them out, to observe physical distancing regulations.
- We have removed all shared items and will be suspending our tea and coffee services until further notice.
- We will be asking all clients to remain outside until they are called in for their appointment, either by text or phone call.
- We will be asking that there be no children under the age of 13 booked for the month of June. In an effort to limit the amount of people in the studio we must ask that your child is able to sit through their appointment on their own.
- We are asking clients to please leave their pets at home for the foreseeable future.
- We will not be offering blowdrys for the first two weeks of June (this may continue further into June and will be at your stylist's discretion).
- We have sourced multiple disinfectants, sterilizers, and cleaners and will be on a strict regime throughout the day to ensure that any shared surfaces are kept clean and bacteria-free.

As small business owners, running on tight margins, Kara and I have decided that we must implement a small fee in order to account for the increase in costs due to P.P.E. We do not take lightly the need to keep your sisters, brothers, mothers, and best friends safe, and will do so by going above and beyond what is expected of our industry. These items aren't cheap, but we will do our best to keep the additional costs to a minimum.

With that being said, we have the greatest sympathy for anyone going through hard times financially right now and understand better than anyone the need to feel and look good. So, should you find yourself struggling, please let either your stylist or the front desk know, and we will refrain from adding the fee to your service.

During these difficult times we want to look to our community for support and in return, provide that same assistance! Kitsilano is our home, and we are beyond grateful to have the opportunity to open our doors again.

We look forward to welcoming you all back into our Studios and can't wait to get back to helping you be your best selves.

Thank you for trusting us, Shelby, Kara, Mike, and the rest of the team at Attic Hair Studio and Undercroft Hair & Tattoo."

**Let's meet at the beach**

I spoke with two close friends on a conference video call today. Keeping in mind that the province's public health official has given the go-ahead for slightly "expanding your social bubble," we decided to meet next week at the beach when I am back in Vancouver. We would still have to maintain a 6 feet distance from each other, it seems. And hugging also remains out of the equation.

Julie suggested we should bring a bottle of wine. We quickly realized that we would each have to bring our bottles, as we can't be sharing at this time. That felt a little sad. I also wondered whether single-serve wine bottles will now flood the market.

**Pakistan is also opening-up**

On the other side of the world, Pakistan is also opening up. The decision to do so seems off to me, as the contagion arrived there much later, and the country is yet to peak. In British Columbia today, there were only three new cases in the entire province. In Islamabad alone, the city where my parents live, there were over 30 cases yesterday. And, Islamabad isn't even a huge city.

This is exactly a month later when I shared the dashboard here last. On April 19th, there were 8418 cases in the country and only 181 in Islamabad. A month later, there are 47,271 reported infections in Pakistan and 1235 in Islamabad alone.

The country's prime minister keeps in reiterating that it is better to die from the virus then from hunger.

I suspect Pakistan is on-board with the entire herd immunity argument. Very scary.

**May 22nd, 2020**

**An online Ph.D. defense**

Leena is defending her Ph.D. dissertation next week. At the University where she works, all defenses have been moved online. Another friend and I helped her do a practice talk today on Zoom. It felt rather odd, Ph.D. defenses in Canada are large public events, often celebratory in nature, where friends, families, and colleagues congregate to engage with the candidate's multiple years' worth of intellectual labor and reflections.

Leena's defense will not be anything of that sort. It will be a closed event (the public is not allowed because of concerns of 'Zoom bombing' and limited bandwidth of the Zoom platform), and it will be a rather clinical experience.

**May 24th, 2020**

**Eid**

Today is Eid. A day of celebration for Muslims around the world, which marks the

end of Ramadan, a month-long period of fasting. I have been drained by Ramadan this year. It wasn't just the long fasting time period (every day from sunrise to sunset), but also the sheer isolation of doing so. Usually, I visit my parents for Ramadan and Eid, and it serves as a time to catch up with family and friends.

On Eid day, the etiquette is to visit a mosque for congregational Eid prayers. This year, that was not possible. Instead, we logged onto a virtual Eid service ran by a queer-friendly mosque out of Toronto. Despite being online, it was still lovely and provided a sense of community. The prayers were led by a female Imam. We placed the laptop on the ground and stood in prayer behind her.

**May 27th, 2020**

**Return to Vancouver**

After sheltering in place for several weeks in rural British Columbia, we have decided to return back to Vancouver today. News and messages from friends regarding the city's "reopening" have been streaming in over the last few days, and we are curious to see what that may look like.

While it is unlikely that I will sit in a coffee shop with my laptop or work out of the downtown public library, which I am not even sure has reopened, it will be good to see some life on the streets, even if 6 feet apart.

**June 3rd, 2020**

**Meeting Ayesha after 3 months**

Today, I finally met a friend after three months, the first time ever since social

distancing kicked in British Columbia. We followed the current health advisory, which is to expand your social circle slightly, if one is comfortable with the risk, but to keep your social bubble small and constant. I haven't seen any of my friends or family in person, and I felt it was important to see Ayesha, just to get some relief from lockdown fatigue.

We met in a park in the afternoon. It was a beautiful sunny day. A lot of people were out, but most were maintaining distance from those around them. I noted people in pairs and occasionally in small groups sitting on the grass, dispersed throughout the park.

There were no hugs or handshakes, just a wave. We sat on a bench, I took one corner, and she took the other, ensuring that there was ample distance between us. She was armed with disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizers, as was I. I did notice her occasionally sniff, which, to be honest, made me slightly paranoid. I had a face mask in my pocket but fought the urge to pull it out and wear it. I was just being silly, I thought. It's springtime; the air is full of pollen, surely that's why she has an itchy nose: not COVID-19.

Nonetheless, it felt nice to be out in the sun in the company of a friend.

**June 9th, 2020**

**COVID-19 is a governmental conspiracy to receive funding from the goras**

My parent's cook is leaving today for a few days to attend a wedding in his village, some 6 hours away. He is planning to take a public bus home. I spoke with him on the phone, trying to convince him that given the rising infections in the country, it is perhaps better that he skips the wedding.

I also let him know that if he decides to go when he comes back, he will have to self-isolate for at least 4-5 days (it is unlikely he will for 14 days).

He dismissed my concern: "There is no disease in my village. I will leave early in the morning when the buses are mostly empty. Do you know what I have been hearing? That Imran Khan (Pakistan's Head of State), is falsely reporting increased infections, so he gets money from the *goras* (white people). I have heard that when someone dies from a heart attack, the doctors have been told to report the cause as the coronavirus when someone dies of pneumonia, they again write down corona."

**June 10th, 2020**

**Corona in the family**

I got news of COVID-19 infections within my extended family today. Three relatives, all elderly, have tested positive. They live in Islamabad. Apparently. Pakistan is yet to peak, but the country has already – prematurely- removed social distancing restrictions. They exist on paper, but not in policy or practice.

As of now, Pakistan ranks amongst the top ten countries reporting the highest numbers of infections, according to the WHO.

**June 14th, 2020**

**Julie's graduation dinner**

Today, my friend Julie, graduates from her Ph.D. program. Since universities remain closed across Canada, all graduation ceremonies have been shifted online. Her boyfriend invited a few of her friends to join them for a celebratory dinner at an

Indian restaurant.

I wasn't comfortable with the idea. In my opinion, it is too soon to return to restaurants. The province has issued specific guidelines for the reopening of restaurants. Some of these include seating at reduced capacity and the wearing of face masks by waiters. However, I politely declined the invitation.

**June 16th, 2020**

**The value of life**

A distant relative of mine in Islamabad passed away today from the virus. She was an older woman in her 80s. Her daughter, dressed in a protective suit, was by her side when she passed away. The hospital where she admitted refused to put her on a ventilator, citing her age as the reason. Honestly, I still don't understand why the elderly are considered less worthy than the young. I suppose this is based on a neoliberal calculation of productive worth; it is not economically feasible to save the elderly; they are a burden on taxpayer's money, they can no longer earn- why save them? As opposed to, let's say a baby (particularly a white baby) who has their entire life remaining to contribute to the economy.

**June 17th, 2020**

**What, the bars have reopened?**

An old friend called me from Montreal. As of today, Quebec remains the most infected province in Canada; restrictions there have been tighter as well. They have started to reopen in recent days but are a bit behind British Columbia in that regard. When I told my friend that I passed by a packed bar today, he was shocked. "What,

the bars have reopened?" he exclaimed.

Yup, they have. And they are packed.