María Florencia Blanco Esmoris

“Mate was not to be missed.”

Buenos Aires, Argentina, 15 March – 20 March 2020



Photo by Matías Castellanos – The world upside down: the inverted straw (El mundo del revés: la bombilla dada vuelta). Reproduced with permission.

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ethnographic approach in focusing on the forms of inhabiting the home for the middle-class families in Haedo. I am a researcher, a secondary school teacher and a University professor. I live with my partner in a 45 square meters apartment located in Ramos Mejía, La Matanza, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

15.3., Sunday, La Matanza, Buenos Aires

Uncertainty. Everything seemed far away. A few hours earlier I had been working on a paper at my colleague's house. Her husband greeted me with his elbows; I thought "what an exaggeration". Now we were in the apartment, more specifically on the couch with my partner, while we listened to the announcement of President Alberto Fernandez. The situation is serious. As he spoke and made the announcement, we noticed that we had neither alcohol gel nor bleach and almost no yerba mate left. We googled and found so much information about the Corona Virus that we left the web. My wapp groups exploded: China, Italy, Mate, virtual education, care, people in the street, unprotection, the Goverment. The Goverment. Just a few minutes later my dad rang the bell with five kilos of yerba. I thought that God existed and thanked my dad. Mate was not to be missed. Throughout the night I received numerous emails from state agencies, universities, companies announcing their measures. Reflections were circulating with suggestions for care and cleanliness. I remembered that two weeks ago my mother had bought more than a thousand pesos in chinstraps and I thought "how exaggerated", while my brother thought she had been swindled. I looked at my cupboards again and noticed that we had almost no food. Everything that seemed far away was nearby and my apartment was not well sanitized. My partner spoke to the office and no one was coming on Monday. Again and again I saw #stayathome (#QuedateEnCasa).

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“Mate was not to be missed.”
https://boasblogs.org/de/curarecoronadiaries/mate-was-not-going-to-miss/

Photo by Fernando Javier Blanco Esmoris (IG: @fer_con_f_de_flex) – Sin título (Photo taken in isolation). Reproduced with permission.

16.03, Monday, La Matanza, Buenos Aires

We sent the paper; my friend and I were relieved. I talked to a friend that is in Portugal at the moment and she is not well, the quarantine does not help. Teachers write about the quarantine, I read a little and I get overwhelmed. I wash my hands. We drink mate. I keep writing. We cook with my partner something simple, we want to change our diet since we are not going to wear out and we are going to be at home. We can't. We eat pasta. While we watch some laborers working on the construction site, they build a construction and we are locked in. They're unprotected. We are confused. I looked at some websites. People want to get together but no, hashtags come up, #noholidays (#nosonvacaciones). There are questions from the university institutions of public management but we will move forward. We will get by. I'm writing to my mom to take care of my grandfather.

17.03, Tuesday, La Matanza, Buenos Aires

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Source: Freepick

I look at social networks and people keep posting “NO HOLIDAYS”. I never worked so hard since the announcement of this, I’m sure my spine is atrophied from not raising well the computer. I don’t talk to many people because again I am overwhelmed. Some messages with my friends, many messages for work. I looked at the website of the World Health Organization; I downloaded a report that was produced in February (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/srp-04022020.pdf). I was surprised: so long ago. Then I checked the government website (https://www.argentina.gob.ar/). I sent emails, many emails. A colleague wrote me that he passed on my contact for a note with a press agency about greetings and

mate in times of corona virus I study daily life although not necessarily mate. I tell him OK, I can talk about changes in daily routines. They write me to arrange the meeting. I tell them that I do not live in the city and it's difficult for me to move. They cannot come home, just in case, I start reading. Georg Simmel studied sociability in the modern cities. I also reviewed Mary Douglas' book *Purity and Danger* about the idea of contamination and contagion. I check the page of the National Institute of Yerba Mate (INYM).

"Don't shae the mate, the bombilla and the thermos. Today we are going through a very special sanitary situation, it is really important that we do not share the mate" (https://inym.org.ar/noticias/institucionales/78744-no-compartas-el-mate-la-bombilla-y-el-termo.html). They already suggest we should separate mates and sanitize well the elements. I made some notes and left the computer. I looked at the TV and there was a technician from the Malbrán Institute[1], my stomach closed. They were telling us about the situation at the institute, an institute that we now – and always – need the most. They don't earn anything and they give everything. They talk about the lack of funding, the virus, the tests, vaccines, studies and 12-hour shifts. I didn't sleep well.

18.03., Wednesday, La Matanza, Buenos Aires

I woke up and turned on my cell phone. I check social media, memes about the mate: "mate is not suspended".[2] My partner prepared the mate, momentarily we have yerba Canarias and we just put some sugar – cane sugar. I got up and ordered my chaos. All the books, clothes and knick-knacks I had lying around the house I ordered and others I simply threw away in the room. I closed the door. The news agency wrote me that they were not coming and that we were going to do the interview by phone. They want to call me and I tell them I don't have a phone. I did

the interview by cell phone and then by *Google Hangouts*. I told them that people don't stop drinking mate but look for other variants to drink but being responsible with others. Also that it was too recent to think in terms of whether or not a habit changes. We talked about how some greetings had been altered, at least in this extraordinary time, the kiss for the elbow or a smile. I repeated that I didn't study mate, but that I was dedicated to analyzing everyday life. I said that it was a global phenomenon with a local experience. We talked about hypermediatization, care and responsibility. I told them that we should not think in totalities or universals and that each experience and response is particular. That I personally am an assiduous mate drinker and that there are "virtual mateadas". Later I made a video call with *Hangouts*. I combed my hair and put on another T-shirt even though I was in flip-flops. We saw each other, talked and cut. I washed my hands, made a mate. I had a meeting of the university team by *Zoom* and another one by *Hangouts*, we thought about pedagogical strategies and "gave each other strength". My brother asks me about the interview, tells me he's anguished. We share information, I tell him about the virtual mate and he tells me he is going to try it with friends. At night I have a headache from being almost 18 hours in front of the computer. My brother sent me a link to see a Japanese anime and I'm excited about it. A colleague tells me "the order of the sense has been altered".

> "people don't stop drinking mate but look for other variants to drink"

19.03, Thursday, La Matanza, Buenos Aires

I woke up and looked at the cell phone, there were many e-mails and on the social

networks, there were photos and pictures of the covers of the newspapers with an initiative of ADEPA (Association of Argentinean Journalistic Entities) with the message: “We all face the virus together. Let’s make the responsibility viral. #We are responsible”. Shocking and mobilizing. Then I see a video in a friend’s story (voxdotcom: https://www.instagram.com/tv/B9zvlUTgJEP/?igshid=11d02gkom6w00).

We drink mate in bed. We share. It’s hard to drink individually but we haven’t talked or seen anyone for days. We are alone but together. So we are not alone. I got up and started working on virtual classes. I wash my hands. My partner wanted to print a document and we didn’t have the printer installed, we couldn’t do it either. We yelled at each other and went to print that out at a bookstore. On the way back we bought vegetables and fruit. I continued in with the laptop. We took turns intermittently because he didn’t have a notebook. I write to a colleague that this is a roller coaster. I put it: “affectivity and being affected in times of corona virus”. My mom calls me, asks me if I have bleach, I say no and she cuts me off. We get a promotion from *Farmacity*, we go, we see more people circulating. We stand in line for two people, we buy soap and sweet things, while we pay I think: what a bizarre purchase. I went home, ate grapes and kept writing. . I am grateful. President Alberto Fernandez is meeting with the governors, it seems they will soon announce the quarantine. In the news they talk about the #balconazo, people on the balconies. I check the INYM website and they uploaded a video to sanitize the elements of the mate (https://inym.org.ar/noticias/yerba-mate-argentina/78748-toma-mate-toma-precauciones-como-higenizar-correctamente-mate-bombilla-y-termo.html). I am going to send it to my mom. I wash my hands.

19.03, Thursday – Part 2

Zoom meeting with friends. Beer and pizza. At 9pm, a round of applause on the

balcony, acknowledging the dedication and constant work of the health system. I grieve, I almost cry. The old people upstairs came out to applaud. I got excited again. I applauded even louder. I read that there are psychologists who work online and also give pilates and virtual yoga. My pilates teacher sent an ad to try out that format. On *Facebook*, groups of cooks give recipes to optimize the use of the goods. I watch TV. My pilates teacher sends another message with a link to *Instagram* with a post by dietitians and nutritionists to improve everyday diets. I wash my hands. President Alberto Fernandez appears. There's no more pizza. Alberto declares the total quarantine until 31/03. He advances the holiday of April 2 for the fallen in Malvinas, again I get excited. I remember my friend who is investigating Malvinas. My brother sends me a message that we must be careful, he also sends me a reflection from "Bifo" (https://cajanegraeditora.com.ar/blog/cronica-de-la-psicodeflacion/). Alberto or Alberta gives me peace of mind. Reading I feel that there are reflections either very absolute or very stylized. Nothing convinces me. Everything is very mundane and real. My hands are dry and tight. I want to embrace my parents. My partner and I don't want to do the dishes anymore. He looks around on the internet. I look at the TV again and it says: "A ship in quarentine", a man who was in Uruguay and came from Holland escaped from the hospital and got on the ship and crossed to Buenos Aires. He was detected and now the whole ship is in quarantine, 400 people. Paradoxes of a first world that we now want more away than ever. All very mundane and real. They say "there's tension". I wash my hands.

20/3 Friday. The beginning

First day of mandatory quarantine. I don't have a schedule, I don't do routines. I drink mate. It is thought that there is a state of total availability. We buy granola bars and nuts. We eat a pie. We send a paper with a group of colleagues. I talk to my mom. I'm

still on video calls. I don't cut. I go out on the balcony to get some sun for a while. A native sends me a wapp saying she's ordering and that we have to be "positive". I write things down in my diary to write a reflection on my topic: the house. People don't stop the e-mails or the wapp. I have to make a schedule. I wash my hands. A friend of mine tells me that she has ordered her house for the online session with her psychoanalyst. I talk to my cousin, who is worried. I half-way through a movie, but my head is pounding and I can't rest.

I started writing this diary during the suggested quarantine and followed it one day after the mandatory quarantine in Argentina started. I did not know that the 45 square meters of my apartment were going to become my one and everything: my office, my place of exercise, relaxation or entertainment. On March 20th, I felt that the city of Ramos Mejia was desolate and paradoxically people where there, at their homes. Now, as I am putting this document together, I am noticing at least two issues: 1) the purpose of keeping a daily record of my quarantine was impossible with the multiple work demands that were deepened by a pedagogical and investigative virtualization. 2) In Argentina, we continue with mandatory isolation, although now in many places it oscillates between phase 2 and phase 5 of the supposed "new normality". We are at the peak of infection and death. We have been in isolation for more than 150 days (written the 29th August). Today nobody applauds anymore but there are anti-quarantine demonstrations. Tensions between states, citizens, care and freedom are becoming more and more intense.

Footnotes

[1] National Institute of Microbiology “Dr. Malbrán”.

[2] An example: “The mate is not suspended” (El mate no está suspendido), on Twitter, 14.3.2020 (https://twitter.com/adricossettini/status/1238803963513917440?s=21).