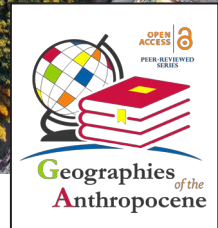


GLOBAL THREATS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: FROM COVID-19 TO THE FUTURE

Leonardo Mercatanti - Stefano Montes (Editors)

Foreword by Paul Stoller

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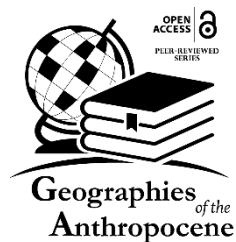


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Leonardo Mercatanti

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Editors



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Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

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Foreword: Bush/Village/Anthropocene

Paul Stoller
West Chester University

When times are troubled, Songhay people in Niger and Mali look to the bush for solutions. For them, the world is divided into the bush, the wild, untamable and uninhabited wilderness, and the village which is the settled, rule-governed space of social life. In the bush you confront unimaginable and unrivaled power. In the village the fragility of the life-cycle imposes limits on the capacity for living. If trouble comes to the village, Songhay elders like to say, it's because people have demonstrated disrespect for the bush. The relation of bush to village, then, has much to teach us about being human in the Anthropocene. It has much to teach us about how to secure our future in increasingly troubled times. As the contributors to *Global threats in the Anthropocene: from COVID-19 to the future* suggest in clear-sighted and powerfully articulated essays, the "global bush" is looming over the "global village" each and every day, threatening us with nothing less than extinction (See Stoller nd1; nd2).

I recently participated in a seminar the subject of which was the phenomenology of looming. The presenter, Jason Throop, discussed his experiences at the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic. In a forthcoming essay, Throop eloquently discusses the impact that COVID-19's looming presence had on himself and his family. (See Throop forthcoming.) During the ensuing discussion, the participants tried to define the indeterminate fuzziness of "looming." For me, "looming" always brings to mind an image of a gathering wave of dust in Tillaberi, Niger, a wave of dust that is slowly but inexorably coming to engulf people, including me, in a towering cloud that eclipses the sun.

The COVID-19 pandemic is like a series of dust waves that are crashing down upon us. These dust waves are choking our future. We find ourselves today in a perilously stressful state. COVID-19 is everywhere and is going nowhere. Despite the increasingly rapid rate of highly effective vaccinations, there are new, more contagious and deadly variants of the virus that are spreading widely in Europe, North America, South Asia and South America.

What's more, COVID-19 fatigue is now the new norm. Tired of social-distancing protocols, people are taking risks. People are like resisting

vaccination a decision that could endanger not only themselves and their loved ones but also strangers they might encounter at a restaurant, a grocery store, or an airport. And who is to say that COVID-19 is a singular phenomenon? Given the ongoing degradation of the natural world, we can probably expect another virus to jump from the bush, as Songhay people like to say, to the village.

But the stressful realities of COVID-19's robustness are only part of the picture. There are other troubles in the world. In western Niger, the remote and poor region of the world where I conducted many years of anthropological research, the countryside is overrun with violence. Islamists loot small villages and demand protection tribute from farmers, who, if they're lucky, earn \$300 a year. If the peasant farmers don't comply, the Islamists kill them. In May of 2020, they killed 20 people in a Western Niger village that I know. In early 2021, they killed 100 villagers in the same region. What had been a poor place graced with gracious conviviality and beautiful ceremony is now beset with religious intolerance and the violence of hate.

Sadly, these trends are widespread. In the U.S. there is no shortage of systematic racism, ethnic discrimination, hateful violence, income inequality, and, of course, coronavirus infections, hospitalizations, and deaths—all of which creates ever-present anxiety and stress—especially if you are neither white nor Christian. If you combine these elements, which are inextricably linked, we are all standing in the path of looming waves of dust that relentlessly overwhelm us. In this troubling existential state, we are immobilized. Our lives flash before our eyes. What must we do to confront and adapt to these ever-looming waves of dust? (See Stoller, 2021).

As the contributors to *Global threats in the Anthropocene: from COVID-19 to the future* make clear, our contemporary state of emergency can be traced to the longstanding culture of extraction, the fundamental tenet of which is that human beings can dominate nature and one another. Since the Industrial Revolution, human beings have extracted from nature such wonders as fossil fuels, minerals, trees, and water. In doing so, we have depleted the Earth's natural resources and produced polluting agents that have brought on the death of forests and the degradation of rivers, oceans, coral reefs, and landscapes—all in the name of progress and capitalism.

Extraction also creates regimes of mastery, compelling states and/or individuals to exercise a "will to power" to establish and maintain social and political domination. The "will to dominate" has brought us incessant warfare, famine, disease, inequality, racism, and the aforementioned violence of hate. Even in the sciences and social sciences, we extract

principles, formulas, categories, definitions, and theories from the free flow of experience, all of which provide a sense of control and certainty. We study. We know. We understand—or think we understand.

In their revolutionary and insightful book, *Hyposubjects: On Becoming Human*, Morton and Boyer (2021, p. 62) write:

Because mastery, transcendence, excess—that is the world that we know. Those are the qualities of this era. And with the refinement of excessive mastery in various localities has emerged relentless predatory impulses—monotheistic, capitalistic—to bring the world into alignment with our transcendence mission. An imploded form of subjectivity is worth considering as an antidote. One that is denser, but also more aware of the architecture of its density and of the gravitational forces that hold it together, one that is not constantly seeking the beyond.

Put another way, we can say that the practice of mastery underscores the illusory belief that the village can master the bush.

Indigenous people like the Songhay of Niger and Mali understand that the bush is always more powerful and dangerous than the village. If the forces of the bush are not respected, they bring drought, floods, destruction, diseases like COVID-19, and death. If you attempt to master the bush, as a Songhay proverb states, it masters you.

For Songhay people, who live in harm's way day in and day out, there is little control and no certainty. Most Songhay people have learned to accept their existential limits and live fully within them, which, in the end, enables them to live robustly in profoundly challenging physical, economic, and political circumstances. (See Stoller, 2014; See also Jackson, 2011) Wise Songhay elders say that to protect the village from the excessive power of an all-consuming bush, villagers need to practice more modesty, creativity, flexibility, and playfulness, and less certainty, mastery, and domination. Considering the aforementioned ramifications of the Anthropocene, it may well be prudent to adopt such counsel.

In the end the incisive contributions in *Global threats in the Anthropocene: from COVID-19 to the future* give me hope. Indeed, our extractive past may well have led us to the edge of extinction, but if we allow ourselves to follow the practices of wise indigenous elders, our future could become a truly human one.

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Esperienza pandemica e settori di attività

Leonardo Mercatanti¹

Ai cambiamenti che negli ultimi decenni hanno coinvolto vari settori di attività economica, oltre al mondo della ricerca scientifica, è stata impressa una nuova e inaspettata accelerazione a causa dell'esperienza pandemica. Nei vari campi del sapere la ridefinizione dei modelli organizzativi, degli strumenti tradizionali di ricerca e della didattica e perfino della base epistemologica di partenza hanno determinato un'inedita sfida per tutti i soggetti che in varia misura ne rappresentano le professionalità. Oggi più che mai appare urgente ridefinire il ruolo, il senso e il metodo delle varie branche del sapere.

Sulla base di queste parziali riflessioni è incentrata la seconda parte di questo volume, composta da sette saggi, dal titolo "Esperienza pandemica e settori di attività". Un filo rosso sembra legare tutti i contributi e cioè che l'esperienza pandemica ha messo in moto nuovi percorsi, anche creativi, di azione all'interno di ciascun contesto disciplinare con esiti che sicuramente influenzeranno il futuro dei settori di attività economica e, in generale, delle scienze (Morri, 2020). La pandemia insomma ha rappresentato per certi versi un importante periodo di rottura che ha obbligato i vari operatori a trovare soluzioni per garantire un determinato livello di rinnovata efficienza ed efficacia.

Il saggio di Martin Bohle (*Citizen, Geoscientist and Associated Terraformer*) affronta il tema della scienza responsabile, intesa come bene pubblico, e della conseguente responsabilità sociale dei geoscienti, sapienti esploratori del mondo abiotico grazie non solo alla ricerca sul campo, ma anche alle analisi di laboratorio che restituiscono risultati fondamentali per una visione più completa e complessa delle minacce globali nell'Antropocene. Le azioni concrete da intraprendere per superare le criticità individuate dalla geoscienza sono certamente argomento di altre discipline appartenenti alle scienze sociali e umanistiche. Ecco che l'esperienza pandemica ha suggellato la necessità di un approccio multidisciplinare alla risoluzione dei problemi. Nonostante ciò, oggi, i geoscienti hanno a disposizione uno strumento specifico come la geoetica e sono, dunque, più responsabili della diffusione del relativo manifesto ai

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cittadini: essi sono, secondo le parole dell'autore *assistant terra-formers* (Bohle, infra).

L'esigenza di non avere una soluzione di continuità nella didattica durante il periodo pandemico, ha consentito la diffusione dell'uso di piattaforme didattiche e di nuovi strumenti di apprendimento. Ha anche motivato i docenti più reticenti a compiere un indispensabile sforzo per adeguarsi alle nuove necessità della formazione. Alcune di queste nuove competenze saranno utili anche in tempi di normalità. Giuseppe Ferraro, con il contributo *La storia, lo spazio e la pandemia ai tempi di google maps. Risorgimento e brigantaggio nelle attività didattiche*, effettua un ragionamento sull'alterazione dell'equilibrio tra lezioni frontali e attività laboratoriali. Nel caso specifico, riguardante le scuole secondarie di secondo grado, l'autore illustra gli esiti di alcune pratiche didattiche innovative adottate durante la pandemia, facendo emergere l'importanza di un inedito percorso di riflessione sull'apprendimento che ha coinvolto i docenti di varie discipline.

Uno dei settori di attività più colpiti durante il periodo pandemico è stato certamente il turismo (Rossi, 2020). Giuseppe Reina, con il contributo *Gli itinerari culturali europei come modello di sviluppo ecosistemico per i territori marginali*, propone il caso studio riguardante il progetto dell'Itinerario dei monasteri italo-greci del Valdemone, promosso dai comuni del distretto turistico *TaorminaEtna*, utile per riflettere, ad una scala geografica molto più ampia, sulla necessità di operare una ormai necessaria riqualificazione del paesaggio ordinario puntando sul turismo culturale, inteso come strategia di compensazione territoriale che valorizza le particolarità ambientali e culturali delle aree interne e marginali, riducendo il carico nei territori costieri e avviando virtuosi percorsi di destagionalizzazione.

Il settore dell'agricoltura, con le sue varie forme, sempre più evolute, di coltivazione e di produzione, se da un lato non ha subito una vera crisi durante l'emergenza pandemica, dall'altro, tuttavia, si è posto come strumento strategico che, anzi, ha permesso di superare determinate preoccupazioni, come la garanzia dell'approvvigionamento di generi alimentari, una delle prime e più inquietanti paure della popolazione in lockdown.

Giorgia Iovino, con il contributo *Italian agriculture in the shade of a pandemic. New and old*, pone l'accento sul fatto che tutto ciò non debba far dimenticare le vulnerabilità del settore in Italia. Le criticità relative al tema sono diversificate: in alcuni contesti, infatti, vi è la costante riduzione della superficie agricola utilizzata, con lo sviluppo di pratiche di iperproduzione

poco sostenibili o con l'aumento della dipendenza alimentare dall'estero, in altri, invece, si assiste alla concentrazione e all'accaparramento dei terreni. È necessaria una regolamentazione globale che conduca ad una transizione ecologica.

Livio Perra, con lo studio *Il COVID-19 e la sua dimensione pedagogica nel mondo giuridico* ha invece focalizzato l'attenzione sulle risposte che i vari Stati hanno messo in campo per fronteggiare le minacce di un virus invisibile e poco noto. Ciò è avvenuto attraverso l'azione giuridica affidata alle ordinanze contingibili e urgenti, il cui utilizzo talvolta eccessivo è stato giustificato dal diritto alla vita e dal bene supremo della salute dei cittadini, monitorata giornalmente e, proprio per questo, causa di provvedimenti *extra ordinem*.

Giuseppe Terranova è l'autore del saggio *Tradition and innovation: the controversial relationship between religion and pandemics*. Qui si propone uno studio sulla risposta alle sfide poste dalla pandemia da parte delle comunità religiose internazionali, con un approfondimento sulle realtà brasiliane e coreane che in sostanza hanno negato l'esistenza di un virus rifiutando di richiedere ai fedeli i noti sacrifici legati alla pandemia. Si indagano, in particolare, i diversi equilibri interni ai due Stati tra religione, scienza e politica.

L'ultimo saggio, di Andrea Perrone, è intitolato *Geopolitica del Covid-19. La pandemia e i suoi riflessi su piani multipli e transcolari*. Qui si analizzano le ripercussioni geopolitiche ed economiche della pandemia. Si parte dalla crisi (temporanea) della globalizzazione alla riflessione che proprio dalla consapevolezza dei rischi a cui l'umanità può essere sottoposta potrebbero essere portate avanti con efficacia alcune iniziative di portata globale (Green New Deal) e una presa di posizione più seria e condivisa sui temi ambientali.

Non rimane che concludere questa introduzione citando Angelo Turco che ha efficacemente definito la pandemia come un "ambiente di apprendimento" (Turco, 2020, p. 5).

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Pandemic experience and activity sectors

Leonardo Mercatanti¹

The changes that in recent decades have involved various sectors of economic activity, in addition to the world of scientific research, have been given a new and unexpected acceleration due to the pandemic experience. In the various fields of knowledge, the redefinition of organizational models, of traditional research and teaching tools, and even of the initial epistemological basis has represented an unprecedented challenge for all those who represent the human resources of these areas in varying degrees. Today, more than ever, it seems urgent to redefine the role, meaning and method of the various branches of knowledge.

The second part of this volume called “Pandemic experience and activity sectors” is based on these partial reflections and consists of seven essays. A common thread which links all the contributions is that the pandemic experience has set in motion new paths, even creative ones, of action within each disciplinary context, with outcomes that will surely influence the future of the sectors of economic activity and of sciences in general (Morri, 2020). In short, in some ways the pandemic has represented an important period of rupture that has forced the various operators to find solutions to ensure a certain level of renewed efficiency and effectiveness.

The essay by Martin Bohle (*Citizen, Geoscientist and Associated Terra-former*) addresses the theme of responsible science, understood as a public good, and the consequent social responsibility of geoscientists, wise explorers of the abiotic world thanks not only to field research, but also to laboratory analyses that give fundamental results for a more complete and complex vision of global threats in the Anthropocene. The concrete actions to be undertaken to overcome the criticalities identified by geoscience are certainly the subject of other disciplines belonging to the social sciences and humanities. Here the pandemic experience has sealed the need for a multidisciplinary approach to solving problems. Despite this, he argues that today geoscientists have at their disposal a specific tool, that of geoethics, and are therefore more responsible for disseminating the relevant manifesto to citizens: they are, in the words of the author, *assistant terra-formers* (Bohle, *infra*).

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The need to not interrupt the continuity in teaching during the pandemic period has allowed for the spread of the use of educational platforms and new learning tools. It has also motivated the most reticent teachers to make a necessary effort to adapt to the new needs in education. Some of these new skills will also be useful in times of normalcy. Giuseppe Ferraro, with his contribution *History, space and the pandemic at the time of google maps. Risorgimento and brigandage in teaching activities*, makes an argument for the alteration of the balance between lecture style lessons and laboratory activities. In the specific case, concerning second grade secondary schools, the author illustrates the results of some innovative teaching practices adopted during the pandemic, highlighting the importance of an unprecedented path of didactic reflection that involved teachers of various disciplines.

One of the sectors of activity most affected during the pandemic period was certainly tourism (Rossi, 2020). Giuseppe Reina, with his contribution *European cultural itineraries as a model of ecosystem development for marginal territories*, proposes a case study concerning the project of the Itinerary of the Italo-Greek monasteries of Valdemone, promoted by the municipalities of the TaorminaEtna tourist district. This is useful as a means for reflecting, on a much broader geographical scale, on the need to carry out a now necessary requalification of the ordinary landscape by focusing on cultural tourism, understood as a territorial compensation strategy that enhances the environmental and cultural peculiarities of inland and marginal areas, reducing the load on the coast and starting virtuous paths of seasonal adjustment.

If on the one hand the agricultural sector, with its various increasingly evolved forms of cultivation and production, did not suffer a real crisis during the pandemic emergency, on the other hand, however, it has set itself as a strategic tool that indeed made it possible to overcome certain critical issues, such as the guarantee of food supply, one of the first and most worrying fears of the population in lockdown. Giorgia Iovino, with her contribution *Italian agriculture in the shade of a pandemic. New and old*, emphasizes that all this must not make us forget the vulnerabilities of this sector in Italy. In some contexts, in fact, there is a constant reduction in the agricultural area used, with the development of unsustainable overproduction practices or with an increase in food dependence from abroad, in others, on the other hand, there is concentration and land grabbing. Global regulation is needed to bring about an ecological transition.

Livio Perra, with the study *COVID-19 and its pedagogical dimension in the legal world*, has instead focused attention on the responses that the various states have put in place to face the threats of an invisible and, at first, little-known virus. These responses took place through the legal action entrusted to contingent and urgent ordinances, the sometimes-excessive use of which was justified by the right to life and the supreme good of citizens' health, monitored daily and, precisely for this reason, the cause of extraordinary measures.

Giuseppe Terranova is the author of the essay *Tradition and innovation: the controversial relationship between religion and pandemics*. Here he proposes a study on the response to the challenges posed by the pandemic on the part of international religious communities, with an in-depth study of the Brazilian and Korean realities that essentially denied the existence of a virus by refusing to ask the faithful for the sacrifices needed to face the pandemic. In particular, the different internal balances of the two states are investigated, between religion, science and politics.

The last essay, by Andrea Perrone, is titled *Geopolitical implications of the Covid-19. The pandemic and its effects on multiple and transcalar levels*. Here there is an analysis of the geopolitical and economic repercussions of the pandemic. It starts from the (temporary) crisis of globalization to the reflection that precisely from the awareness of the risks to which humanity can be subjected, some global initiatives (Green New Deal) and a more serious and shared stance could be effectively carried out on environmental issues.

All that remains is to conclude this introduction by quoting Angelo Turco who effectively defined the pandemic as a “learning environment” (Turco, 2020, p. 5).

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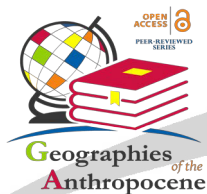
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The COVID-19 pandemic offers food for thought and an opportunity for humanities and science scholars who research our global condition to collaborate. The 21st century society is facing an unprecedented challenge right now: what can we learn from this challenge? Will everything really return to what we used to define as 'normal' at the end of the emergency? Probably not. Structural changes from political, economic, social, and environmental perspectives are already occurring, and impacting the fields of health, education, commerce, governance and travel. Concepts of social space are being redefined and rethought at various scales. Our society, unprepared for a global health emergency of this scale, has been engaged only partially in practices of mitigation and sustainability and we now realize the fragility of our planetary existence. This volume collects 14 original chapters which analyse the new scenarios that could lie ahead in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis in an interdisciplinary context.

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