“Vad kan man göra?”

The redistribution of a disaster

Master’s Thesis

Franz Spengler

Supervised by Ivana Maček

Department of Social Anthropology

Stockholm University

Table of Contents

Abstract

Doing ethnographic work on the effects of COVID 19, I looked at how food service businesses were affected. I found that the government's selective distribution of aid and lacking guidance had forced them to prioritize accommodating customers over their own safety. I look at the economic, mental, and physical risks imposed by this policy, and find that people cope with them through solidarity and creativity.

In this, I draw on theories addressing the state, war, emotional labor, and disaster. My understanding of the state explains how pressure is created for workers to deal with the situation, and emotional labor explains more of the burden, and how they bear it. Vulnerability theory helps explain downward redistribution of the pandemic's burden, and I develop its core points further to capture the socially deleterious impact of lasting disasters. Theories of war and solidarity explain how normality and everyday life are impacted by the disaster, and how people restore a sense of routine and normality cooperatively. I conclude that long term disasters need to be further studied and better understood because of their capacity to worsen and entrench inequality.

Keywords: COVID, disaster, emotional labor, vulnerability, anthropology, food service, Sweden

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without many, many people. Chief among them are my interlocutors, who gave me their time, their energy, and access to their lives. Particularly "Kathleen", who did so much both as an interlocutor and as an intermediary deserves my deepest thanks. I hope that my work here does justice to all of you.

Furthermore, there are my academic allies. First and foremost, my advisor Ivana Maček whose gentle guidance and advice helped me discover the shape of this thesis. Further thanks belong to my friends and classmates who shared this journey and were there to commiserate and deliberate. I did not know how to write a master's thesis when this began, and I thank you for helping me figure it out.

Finally, I would not be here without my friends and family, who have given me a lifetime of support, and who made the difference between slight isolation and severe solitude over the last half year. Now, more than ever, you have been indispensable, and I thank you.

While it has been me committing words to the page, I would like to think that this work is by no means just mine, and nothing would make me more proud of it than if you, too, felt it worthy of some sense of ownership. Thank you all.

Chapter 1

Introduction & Preliminary information

Introduction

When I first interviewed Kathleen, it was a beautiful day. I'd had some tea, and we had gone for a walk around the town. She told me about the coop's winter plans. They had discussed that, perhaps, they could pad their income over the winter months by opening longer, and avoid people bunching up all too closely at the entrance by handling customer flow with reservations. We sat by the water, and I was happy to finally have found a place and people I could work with. We were cheerful, then, and we did not know about what was to come.

> *the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must*
>
> History of the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides, n.d.)

Any anthropological study conducted during the time of COVID has to be about it to some extent: It is noticeable both in its presence and its absence. It has carved itself into our minds, our bodies, and history itself. Understanding it is a monumental task, which requires us to understand the societies within which it raged.

To begin with an introduction: I am an anthropologist, and this discipline has a rich and lengthy history of studying disaster. This informs my perspective, which is personable, and thus, quite grounded – I intend to not just speak as myself, but to give space to the perspectives of the people I have encountered. This is more than mediation, because I have taken their stories apart, and put them back together, so that more than one may speak, and so that they may be larger than the sum of their parts.

Their story, as I am best able to tell it, is the story of a catastrophe where the uneven safeguarding of the population coerced the most vulnerable into easing the experience of those who were valued enough to be protected. It is the story of those whose livelihoods and well-being were put at stake for this arrangement, of what their lot was, and of how they endured. I offer not hope, closure, catharsis, and certainly no easy solution. All I can give is a clear-eyed description of what I have witnessed. At its heart, there lie three questions: What was the burden of the disaster, why was such a disproportionate share of it born by food service workers, and how did they endure and cope with that burden?

The outline

The structure of this paper is designed to tell this story twice over. In chapter 2, it is told in a microcosm, using the example of how an aesthetic of reassurance is coerced through economic pressure, following the lines of power from high to low. Chapters 3 and 4 repeat this, broadening points, picking up points from the previous chapters and adding their own for a more comprehensive view. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork, giving information, and Chapter 5 wraps everything up.

The next section in this chapter will be on the theories I used. Then, I will discuss method, explaining my focus on the interview, its implications, and the lingering effects of a prior theoretical orientation which shaped my data. After, I give an overview of the places and people (the dramatis personae of the story) and my relationship to all, and a rough macroeconomic background, which will highlight the powerful economic forces acting upon my interlocutors.

Chapter 2 focuses on the nature of COVID's burden and its distribution. It starts the ethnography with an anecdote on the aesthetic, and then goes on to *a theory of the state*, interspersing theory and ethnography. I compare interlocutors' understandings of the government with one another, and explain the context in which economic pressure forced specific aesthetic choices.

We ground and supplement these findings with personal accounts in the next section, which heavily draws on *emotional labor theory* to examine the work needed to create the aesthetic. Building up to the next chapter, I also use this theory to illuminate status and power differences which contributed to the coercive force on my interlocutors.

Chapter 3 is the fullest exploration of how the pandemic's burden is distributed. It is mainly theoretical, laying out the *theory of vulnerability* which gets into the broad strokes of how societies value certain groups over others, leading to inequalities of resources and power, which translate into inequalities in how a catastrophe's damage is distributed. I connect this to COVID broadly, drawing on my findings from chapter 2, and make the case that these mechanisms distribute risk downward, and resources upward, always along lines of social stratification.

Chapter 4 comes in two parts. First, I give the fullest understanding of the burden of COVID I can, and second, I look at how people cope and endure. Throughout, I draw on analogies with war and natural disasters for a better frame of reference for COVID.

To discuss the burden, I highlight disruptions of *normality* and *everyday life* caused by the pandemic, the financial slump, as well as the weight of emotional labor. Furthermore, I

look at differences in burden between roles. To discuss enduring and coping, I look at the role of *post-disaster solidarity* in bearing these burdens, how it is limited by certain features of the pandemic, and supported by preexisting structures. Then, I look at creativity, its practical and communal facets, and how theories of *normality* and *everyday life* understand it to help with disruptions. In this, the differences created by roles persist, as different burdens require different solutions.

Chapter 5 begins with some theoretical insight into what may happen after COVID, then offers future perspectives on the theories used in the paper, highlighting particularly the importance of understanding long lasting disaster, and concludes with a summary of my findings.

Theory

Having surveyed the aims of this thesis, I will now give an overview of the theories. My general aim in this selection of theories has been to put together a comprehensive view of the situation by using strong theories of limited purview that complement each other's weaknesses and limitations. They reach from large scale theories of the state, inequality, and resource distribution to small scale theories of emotion, solidarity, normality, and routine.

We find our *theory of the state* in James C Scott's *Seeing like a State* (1998), a book about the violent failures of modernism and it is important here because of its discussion of how ideas are reduced to aesthetic imitations of themselves that have lost their connection to their substance, and a critical view of the state which highlights its powers to harm and the limits of governance.

The *theory of emotional labor* comes from Arlie Hochschild's *The managed Heart* (2012). It concerns the labor of labor both managing one's own as well as others' emotions. This helps us understand the interlocutors' hard work, and offers some insight into the differentials of power and status which place it on their shoulders.

Vulnerability theory presents "the most prominent approach in the anthropology of disasters" (Barrios, 2017, p.154), and for us, the key pieces are Kenneth Hewitt's anthology *Interpretations of Calamity* (2020a) and Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman's anthology *The angry earth* (2020). *Interpretations of calamity* was written to break with a prior paradigm which viewed disasters as outside society entirely. Vulnerability theory, in turn, views disasters as the confluence of environmental hazards and societal factors which create vulnerable groups, the harm to which then creates the disaster. For us, the point of

vulnerability being socially created is key because Hewitt and others stress that these vulnerabilities reflect the values and organization of society.

Post-disaster solidarity, *normality* and *everyday life* are all concepts which I use for an analogy-driven understanding of personal life under COVID. *Post-disaster solidarity* is another contribution from vulnerability theory by Anthony Oliver-Smith (2020a). *Normality* and *everyday life* originally come from Ivana Maček's and Teresa Koloma Beck's respective studies of civilian life in warzones. Both concepts examine the disruptive nature of war, as well as the use of normality and regularity to stabilize against the disruption. Moreover, we draw on findings regarding communal coping and bodily memory from both.

Literature context

In assembling the above works, I have endeavored to draw on texts that are quite foundational and as such, do not have a deep theoretical history, because they are said history. An outlier in this is *Seeing like a state*, which is not aligned in the past not the future with particular traditions, though Scott cites some intellectual forbearers (1998, p.xi). Hochschild's *The managed Heart* (2012) spawned the literature on emotional labor (Steinberg and Figart, 1999) and is itself influenced primarily by feminist progenitors, but also heavily draws on the Marxist tradition.

With vulnerability theory, Hewitt draws on philosophy, and specifically Foucault's concept of biopolitics (2008) to break with the anthropology of disasters as it existed before. The concept of vulnerability has made the leap to medical anthropology now, where it is seeing use in discussing COVID (Napier, 2020; Team and Manderson, 2020) and it has reached and remained in a dominant position in disaster research (Bolin and Kurtz, 2018). Moreover, its fundamental concern with inequality is echoed throughout the literature discussing current events (Pillay, 2021; Buch and Robbins, 2020).

Koloma Beck and Maček, from whom I take *normality* and *everyday life* share roots in cultural anthropological work on societies dealing with war (Koloma Beck, 2020, p.463; Taussig, 1992; Maček, 2007, p.40), and Koloma Beck draws on pragmatic and phenomenologic philosophy (Koloma Beck, 2015, p.158ff).

Method

My method for this study is characterized by two oddities: It was adapted and altered to work in a quickly worsening pandemic situation, and it was designed with different questions and theory than I ended up pursing in mind. I will discuss these in order.

To begin, my field. I worked within the food service industry, in part because they were heavily affected by COVID, but also because the pandemic had blocked access to other fields, and this one was publically accessible. Furthermore, I had a personal connection in Kathleen, who helped me get access to a vegan coop she worked at, though travel there became unsafe, causing me to branch out and also work with closer by restaurants. This had not been my first setback, but rather the last in a series which had also led me to plan my theory independently of my field, as my field was uncertain for a long time before the fieldwork. The experience of constant uncertainty in the months leading up to and into the fieldwork were what ended up creating the disconnect with my previous theory that led to me switching, and they were also intensely stressful and led to me picking up and connecting with experiences of uncertainty in my interlocutors' stories very readily.

This switch to a broader base of interlocutors also led to a big practical hurdle: At the coop, everyone was happy to converse in English, but elsewhere I found just a single person (Joe) who could speak to me in English and was comfortable doing so. Thus, my numerous interviews at other field sites were conducted in Swedish, which I had been learning for about a year at that point. This left me often quite stressed, and in the writing of this piece I have erred on the side of caution with what I took from conversations, to avoid entering translation errors into the material.

My development and choice of method was subject to similar pressures to me finding a field. Though I tried to bring somewhat diverse methods to the field, looking to center senses, chase artifacts, and make connections online, I found myself primarily focusing on interviews of various types to generate data quickly and limit time where I was potentially exposed to COVID in the field[1].

Attempting to still approximate regular pre-pandemic fieldwork, I supplemented first contact interviews with regular visits and contact with some interlocutors to build relationships despite the limiting circumstances, and adapted the style of conversation to suit evolving relationships (Aull Davies, 2002, p.94f). I thus needed to be flexible in what medium I used, occasionally switching to phone (particularly with members of the vegan coop, whom I could not see in person), and kept the interviews brief when interlocutors had limited time. As a result, the interview situations were very diverse.

Drawing on Charlotte Aull Davies' discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of different interview approaches (2002, p.94ff) and my own experience, I present the most important factors which changed style and content of conversations now.

[1] To lower the risk of passing the disease on if I caught it anyway, I wore a mask at all times.

The first factor is privacy. The presence of customers and coworkers influenced what was said, and conversely, their absence – for instance in phone conversations, or at very quiet times of day – did too, with interlocutors being generally more open the more alone we were, though interlocutors conversing with each other, rather than just with me, also put them at ease.

Next, their level of familiarity with me was important, with longer and more familiar relationships yielding more discussion of emotion and experience, and singular encounters being more factual and descriptive, with less openness about personal views or industry gossip. Moreover, my familiarity with them determined whether I had the chance to tailor questions to follow up on previous interesting points.

Finally, the duration of interviews would sometimes be very pertinent, leaving me rushing through my overview questions in as little as five minutes once, and able to explore topics that were on the surface quite mundane at other times. Particularly my ability to get personal background information was influenced by this.

Leading up to the fieldwork, I also tried to address the weaknesses of the form. Feminist voices have long been critical of the interview with regard to the conversational power dynamics it often represents. Both conversational participants, they argue, should be available for inquiries and questions, with the researcher being available as a person as well. (Oakley, 2013; Aull Davies, 2002, p.40f). I have tried to heed this advice, and I must note that the success of such a leveling of the conversational hierarchy was very tied to the state of the relationship. In my work, I found that the key to being seen as a conversational partner was to move beyond the initial interview situation, either to a more conversational flow in the moment or by having more than one conversation, which alleviated time pressure and built familiarity.

This was not just an ethical concern, either. Once my interlocutors felt comfortable with asking me questions, they would tell me about themselves in the process: Their interests, their view of me or my work, and what they thought was fitting to talk about in the pandemic. However, with time being scarce, I did choose to always open with a semi-structured interview. I had entered the field with a specific interest, and though I wanted to be open to discoveries, I also wanted my interactions to be somewhat compact and for them to quickly offer something (Aull Davies, 2002, p.94f), as I rarely knew if my interlocutors might have time for me again.

Most choices beyond this, however, came from a place of pragmatism. I took in- and post-conversation notes instead of recordings both to help me return to key points as I spotted them and to avoid data bloat. In the evenings, I would use these to write down fuller recollections in turn, giving myself another chance to pick out important points to follow up on in the following days (with the same or different interlocutors), and also committing as much as possible to paper before it left my recollection. This forced me through repeated periods of reflection, and gave me the agility to follow interesting leads as they emerged.

Finally, I want to lend some spotlight to the very bones of my method, to the fundamental perspective inherent in anthropological fieldwork. The discipline's personal approach and my choice of field led me to engage with perspectives mostly at the bottom, and my attempt to capture a fuller view has led me to inquire what my interlocutors see when they look up. I apply theory and outside information in my discussion and understanding, but my interlocutors' perspective is the foundation.

My former research interest and its lingering influence

With the practicalities of mid-pandemic-fieldwork discussed, we can now turn to the other odd factor in my work: Its theoretical realignment between the periods of ethnography and writing. My original interest was in understanding where my interlocutors got their information, what ideas and terms they brought to it, how they transformed that information for their purpose, and how they acted on it subsequently. Functionally, this usually meant asking where they got their information – friends, news, government press conferences, and inquiring what plans they had made based on it. The first line of inquiry yielded results, which will come up, but the second usually did not, though sometimes people explained why they could not make plans. Fundamentally, this conceptual approach had me talking to everyone in their capacity as businesspeople first.

What was conceptually absent from these questions and what I would have liked after reassessing my theoretical footing, are questions geared more toward people as individuals, their wellbeing, their experience etc. that explicitly center them and bracket the business.

Beyond these focused questions, I also asked general questions which were supposed to be supplementary, to satisfy curious musings, and to inform my own understanding of the situation. I asked about personal lives, heritage, economics, odd opening hours, experiences with COVID – the list kept growing as I met more people, and found more interesting ideas to follow up on, and these inquiries yielded much of the substance this paper is now based on.

With lots of developments happening on a scale that was entirely beyond my interlocutors, there was not nearly as much they could do with outside information as I had anticipated, and it was my general inquiries, as well as those made out of curiosity which led me to where I am now.

The Dramatis Personae

Before all else, I must introduce you to my interlocutors, both spaces and persons. I lay them out in roughly chronological order, and, naturally, also with some added emphasis determined by the prominence people will have in the ethnography[2].

The vegan coop

Leading the list because it is the most unique, is the site I initially planned to conduct my entire fieldwork at: A hole-in-the-wall café/restaurant staffed half by students where I had a personal friend who'd facilitated my fieldwork plans there. It was particularly interesting because it was vegan, and a cooperative, with the organizational structure originally derived from their moral outlook. Moreover, they spoke English due to their international/student-heavy staff. Given the particularly severe hits their restaurant had taken, I met them all at a stressful and vulnerable time.

My friend Kathleen, who introduced me at the coop, is a white American and a student. Over the course of our work, she went from working the counter to also handling the staffing and allocating shifts. I interviewed her before the fieldwork as part of a pre-study. Due to our preexisting rapport and her open manner, she was the most emotionally open and clear-spoken of the interlocutors.

Cori, a Swedish woman, was the only interlocutor I never met in person, as we only spoke on the phone. She handled a lot of the administrative side of running the place, handling dealings with the bank and tracking the accounts.

Jack is a middle-aged Romanian-born man who had moved in from London. He was a cook and uninvolved in administrative matters. Between his international life and his life experience, he had a very unique perspective on events.

Besides them, I had briefly interacted with Cam, a board member who gave me a brief and intricate rundown of the deeper operations and Ian, who worked as a waiter and general extra hand on the one day I was there in person.

[2] Instead of their real names, I mostly use the names of a Canadian comedy group.

As travel became too unsafe, follow-up talks with Jack and Kathleen also moved to being over the phone only.

The family pizza place

After having decided to add more closer field sites, the first place I walked into was a small family restaurant that mainly served Pizza, and Joe, who did the daytime work six days a week was my contact there – partially because he was nearly always available, and partially because he was personable and fluent in English. His parents had come from Syria in the ‘80s, and by now he was running his fathers’ pizzeria most of the time. He was the eldest of at least three, with everyone in the family taking over work when needed. They mainly served pizza and alcohol and, during the day when I was there, there were always a few old men drinking away their sorrows. Joe usually worked alone, and knew the place inside out, though his father did the bookkeeping. I tried to stop by weekly and talk business, though we ended up talking videogames just as much.

Introducing Myself

Imagine, for a moment, that you are a restaurant employee, and you’ve just finished opening up. Someone walks in. “Hej-hej”, he says. “I’m not a customer.” He’s modestly tall, mid-20’s, long hair, masked face, wearing a black coat and a blue button-up shirt with the top button undone. “I’m a student at Stockholm University. Could I ask you some questions about how things are going with the pandemic?” This is how all of the following interlocutors met me.

Of course, that introduction and following exchange were in Swedish, and it would come through that I did not speak it quite proficiently, and understood less. I’m German (many asked, sooner or later), so I muddled through better than most, but the gap was there. As hospitality employees, my interlocutors pretended gracefully that the mask was not there, and those who did note it seemed surprised by, but approving of my choice.

The yugo bar

The third repeat field site was a five minute walk away from Joe’s pizza place, and like it, had its share of elderly men drinking there in the early hours of the afternoon. Herb, the owner, was from former Yugoslavia, and I only spoke to him in Swedish. He was very distraught about the situation with the pandemic, but due to the language barrier, I could not understand him as well as I would have liked. Frequent presences were a number of friends

and family, some of whom I was sure were working there, though I could not work out who was, and who wasn't. One of them, Seb, spoke English and jumped in to translate a little during my first encounter with Herb. In lieu of the large presence of friends and family there, I have dubbed them the yugo bar.

The three centers

The Pizza place and the yugo bar are both located in the same area, which is one of three suburban city centers around which all sites but the vegan coop are clustered. Near the two, a café and a pub occupy corners of the main intersection. At the corner café, I spoke to a counter employee on my second try. She seemed to be on familiar terms with the owner, who she shared a language with. Though she was not, many who worked there were students. At the pub, I spoke to the owner after several tries; he was an older man of Kurdish heritage with a friendly paternal manner. There were two more places where I did not conduct an interview.

The second center I visited was far smaller, more a crowding of services around a subway exit than anything else. Amongst them there were three small restaurants; one sushi, one bagels, and one pizza. The sushi place was run by an older couple where I spoke to the wife, who had come to Sweden from Hong Kong half a lifetime ago and was an experienced restaurant veteran. They stood out due to their unmatched commitment to COVID safety, up to and including no longer allowing for in person dining. At the bagel place, I spoke to a Coptic Egyptian studying in Stockholm on a scholarship and helping out a friend by holding down the fort who spoke with me in modest English. The pizza place there was a one man show where I only garnered about five minutes of conversation time, as the owner was busy and less welcoming.

The third site only yielded one proper interview, and a few ones that did not come together. The interview was at yet another pizza place, and quite brief.

Method: Power dynamics and bias in participation

Naturally, some demographic factors introduced power dynamics into my study. Among them, the key ones turned out to be age, experience, and class[3]. Though everyone who took the time for me was pleasant, interviewing the more experienced people definitely left me at the lower end hierarchically, particularly because these were mainly the people whom I spoke Swedish to, while things generally felt more even with students and young people.

[3] Gender, notably, rarely seemed relevant, because it was usually superseded by experience.

While the older, more experienced people seemed comfortable talking to me, there was another group of Swedish speakers that I did not manage to connect with much in my fieldwork. I've already mentioned that my questions were more geared toward the business side of things, and, though I'm not certain it was because of this, because of my presentation, or because people didn't want to deal with me, I was often simply referred me to their bosses. Class and other aspects likely played into this (Aull Davies, 2002, p.98f; Fairclough, 2001, p.15f), which would not have made that big a difference to my original theoretical interest. Now, however, it now represents a blind spot in terms of class and language, potentially hiding some of the harder to access, dispiriting experiences of working through the pandemic from this analysis.

The macroeconomics of the pandemic for restaurants

I have given my best to provide a very tacit sense of the places I visited, but one key component is missing from the picture: Money. Now, I did not set out to do an economic survey, but I could not help but make some observations as the financial impact of COVID was perhaps its most clear effect on the lives of the people I encountered.

To begin with, the economic downturn seems to be quite unevenly distributed between residential areas and the central city, with the city being hit far harder: All who work from home are not in the city, and thus, the business they bring to restaurants either moves to somewhere within the reach of their homes, or it vanishes completely. Takeaway is the COVID-safest variant of buying food from a restaurant, and takeaway works far better in residential areas as well: People can go home and eat, whereas city restaurants are far more reliant on in place dining with lunch breaks and the like. I suspect that location gave the vegan coop trouble, as they are on the edge of a city center proper, but higher running costs for making vegan food, or a lack of profit margins from not doing alcohol sales, might be the whole story also.

Due to a hit to their major revenue streams, the yugo bar was doing quite poorly as well, as far as I could gather, and it stemmed from their solution to the thin to nonexistent profit margins in Swedish restauranteering having broken away as social drinking became first less socially viable, and then actively targeted with pandemic rules demanding closure of alcohol selling places at then 10 pm.

This ties into the larger point that the price of eating out where I studied is not necessarily enough to support a business, even without a pandemic raging, and that each place must find a way to create profit margins where there are none. Late night alcohol sales, and

just alcohol sales in general, are one[4]. The one-man pizza place and the sushi place seemed to circumvent this with takeaway (which saves on costly real estate), many sales with thin profit margins, and an artificially small self-employed workforce (themselves)[5]. Some restaurants, I was told as rumor, even employed shady labor practices to exploit state unemployment subsidies for artificially cheap labor. Finally, there was property ownership as another way to give breathing room on tight margins. If I understood correctly, this was what gave Herb and Joe's places some additional breathing room since they did not have the monthly expense of rent.

The key points I want to reiterate here are that first, restaurants were running on quite thin margins, and second, that many of the factors that determined how hard they were hit were completely beyond their control. Some found ways to bend the needle, but none could move it.

[4] Taken from conversations with Herb, Cori, and the owner of the second Pizza place.
[5] They were very busy with small staffs focusing on serving a large amount of takeaway orders.

Chapter 2

State, emotional labor, and aesthetics

A microcosm of power, labor, and governance in the pandemic

How the state is experienced and how aesthetic adaptation is coerced

The perhaps most striking feature of the pandemic when entering some places are the safety precautions – hanging shields, tape lines to indicate spatial restrictions and the like. Here, however, I invite you to start with an off-beat perspective, where we do not view them as narrowly utilitarian measures.

In some of my interviews, I asked how people explained their own businesses' success. At the corner café, one worker there told me that if things were clean – 'ren' in Swedish, customers would feel safe, and be happy to come. Though I thought little of it at first, their presentation was certainly visually striking: Distance between table had not been enforced by removal, but with X-marks, the cashier's was behind a hanging plastic screen separating customer from worker, making for a rather striking first impression, and she stressed their attention to physical distance from customers – 'avstand'.

The same sentiment – and some of the same wording – was produced by the pub owner across the intersection as well, who stressed their cleanliness as a draw for customers also. I doubted the efficacy of some of these measures, since he stressed less visible things, like cleaning a lot, and thoroughly. However, his tale of wide open veranda doors – perhaps a visual indicator that it would be as safe dining inside as outside – drawing people in seemed very much in the same vein of customer reassurance as the story from across the road.

The most striking visuals, however, I found at the sushi restaurant, which had an exhaustive list of measures ranging from a physical barrier to keep distance from customers to scheduled times for taking away food, which had led to them receiving praise from customers, as well as unmatched financial stability, which they attributed (in part) to it being comparatively safe to get food from them. Indeed, they'd had customers thanking them for providing somewhere where they could order food safely.

This phenomenon of customer-oriented aesthetics swung in the other direction as well. Most other places had taken an approach of no visual reminders at all, which was innocuous until it came up. Some explained that they were trusting customers to keep distance. The vegan coop had even opted against wearing any masks generally as some members refused to wear them, and they preferred not giving customers the impression that those wearing masks did so because they were sick.

Noting this phenomenon of aesthetic polarization, I want to introduce a first theoretical perspective, which will connect it to the greater discussion of the Swedish government's role in the pandemic, beginning with an excerpt from James C. Scott's *Seeing*

like a State (1998). In it, he speaks about the connection between governance and aesthetics in the context of villageization, a brutally failed centralization tactic, in Tanzania.

> If the plans for villageization were so rational and scientific, why did they bring about such general ruin? The answer, I believe, is that such plans were not scientific or rational in any meaningful sense of those terms. What these planners carried in their mind's eye was a certain aesthetic, what one might call a visual codification of modern rural production and community life. Like a religious faith, this visual codification was almost impervious to criticism or disconfirming evidence. (Scott, 1998, p.253)

Furthermore, Scott has a clear idea of who such displays are for. The aesthetic needs a beholder to witness it, and it is best seen either by the state, or from a perspective akin to the state. To a lesser extent, those putting on the demonstration also hope that it will "awe spectators and participants (1998, p.254), though that is secondary.

Now, while it is neither my place nor my intent to suggest that visually striking safety precautions taken by restaurants were devoid of actual safety, putting them in the context of Scott's work suggests that style has taken primacy over substance. That, however, does not do justice to the sincere concern for safety on the side of my interlocutors, so it is more appropriate to argue that style, as a project, was becoming divorced from substance.

However, there is a clear disconnect with the situation in Sweden here. With the rules as lax as they are, it is difficult to make the case that a particular aesthetic was enforced. For an analogy with Scott to work, we need two pieces to be present: An observer with certain expectations, and coercive pressure to conform to those expectations.

Reflecting on the opening vignette, there really is only one possible analogue for Scott's observer, and it is who the aesthetic choices are geared to draw in: The customers. Whether they are being lured with the promise of safety, or the impression that eating out continues to be undisturbed by the pandemic, they are the only plausible recipient for the aesthetic message.

Returning to our two original points of analogy, this only leaves us with the question of where the pressure to draw in customers came from. Prompted by Scott's suspicion toward government, we begin by examining my interlocutors' relationship to it.

To start, we take up the topic of artifacts, which I initially intended to use in line with George Marcus' concept of following the object (1995), but which in the end illustrated how

distant from the government my interlocutors were, since government guidance was hard to come by and ill suited.

One of my first observations in the field was finding pamphlets and signs asking people to keep proper distance and follow various other hygiene and safety practices at the vegan coop, and at many nearby places. Cam, who I spoke to briefly, told me that while their sign on proper distancing had come in the mail, the health advice on proper handwashing I had seen in the bathroom actually was something he had printed out after finding it on a government website. It predated COVID significantly too, being dated as ten years old in the copyright (though, another time when I saw the exact same sheet again, the copyright had been updated to 2020). Similarly, the pub's owner also had printed out some A4 information sheets, though we did not have the chance to go into much detail on them.

As a result of my conversation with Cam, I anticipated and asked about government letters and the like at my other sites, which fell under different administrative authorities than the vegan coop. They, as it turned out, had had little to no guidance, and what little communication there had been remained elusive to me. On the whole, communication with the government and its various authorities was far from frictionless. The co-owner of the sushi place followed international news coverage, and her criticism of the Swedish approach singled out the unfitness of recommendations: The recommendations were simply around having people stay home, but, for those who couldn't, there was no guidance on how to act if one couldn't stay home.

The state's inability to penetrate and parse local, non-standardized structures is a central point in *Seeing like a State* (Scott, 1998, p.35): They are not *legible* to the state. Thus, the state needs *simplifications and abstractions* which may be enforced in the material world (1998, p.30), or be applied in the gathering of complex information to suit categories which allow for administration and comparison at a larger scale. Such categories pertain mainly to taxation, and examples include Prussian scientific forestry, Russian cadastral surveys (mainly focused on crop yields) and Napoleonic standardization of tax codes and systems of measurement.

It follows, then, that, while my interlocutors were indeed known to the government, they were only known in particular, specific capacities relevant for regular administration like taxation and health inspection. Conversely, they were opaque in all other aspects – in their social networks, their customer base, access to the knowledge and material required for safety measures, and many more features relevant to their ability to be safe and weather the

pandemic. Thus, they experienced silence on all these aspects of their work, even where they desire communication and guidance.

As the government had proven more distant from my interlocutors than I had anticipated, I began uncovering the myriad of ways in which they saw the government. Starting with those who were quite indifferent, I present the variety of views they held next.

When I inquired how he kept up with current events, Joe told me with the affect of a proudly apolitical person that he did not follow the news (including if not especially government pronouncements) which, when I pressed him further on it over the following weeks, seemed to mean that he got what news he did via his friends over WhatsApp, and from the customers, about whom he once told me that "They love to complain", a habit that apparently extended to politics. In effect, this meant that he was insulated from all but the biggest announcements – such as the mandatory closing of places with an alcohol license at 22:00[6], and the creation of an eight-person gathering limit. However, when I asked about a different speech of Löfvens, where he had spoken about the coming of dark times and individual responsibility – rhetoric that I thought to be very severe at the time – he professed ignorance; it had not filtered through to him. I subsequently spent a quite substantial amount of the fieldwork with the unchallenged working assumption that, at least in the industry, no one cared about the communications that were not backed up by the force of restrictions, and even as I investigated people's attitudes toward government and news, this seemed to prove an accurate general rule.

Jack, too, was quite skeptical of the government. Though he was far less generally opposed to the news than Joe, he nonetheless shared the underlying absence of appreciation for the government's press conferences. When I talked about trying to follow them, he asked me if a recent one I had referenced had just been the "usual copy-paste", and I found myself telling him no, there had been nothing of substance.

With the interlocutors presented so far perhaps come off as quite cynical, the examples of government aid I gathered should explain why they felt this way. Having heard about government aid from Cam on my first day in the field at the vegan coop, I ended up asking just about every person I came across whether they had received any. The pub owner remembered that business tax had been lowered very early in the pandemic for two months,

[6] This is technically inaccurate; the specific rule was that they were to stop serving alcohol at 22:00, and close half an hour later.

and the owner of the second pizza place noted that the rent had been lowered for a few months in summer, which had been prompted by government support to the landlord. Generally speaking, the few measures I heard about had been in the past, for a limited time, and were now done. Their dismissiveness seemed to be grounded in an experience of a government which had not offered them substantial help before, and they had no expectation that that would change now.

My perhaps most key impression of their reception comes from a conversation with Cori where I was following up on some of the details of the aid they had received, which had actually been come in a few weeks or less before our conversation. Nevertheless, when we had moved to a different topic and she was listing the difficulties of the situation, she said that the government had not helped at all; the amount had been so negligible that it was not worth mentioning. And, when I in the same conversation asked how the long delay and uncertainty between applying for help and payment affected their ability to rely on it for future plans, she dismissed my question entirely: The money was not enough to make a difference anyway.

Only the pub bucked this trend, having taken advantage of the government's furlough scheme, which was likely inaccessible to the other people I spoke to, because though it is very substantial in the help it offers, it only applies to salaried positions with a 'kollektivavtal', a negotiated full- or part time contract, while most of the industry seemed to be running on flexible hour contracts.

Returning to the criterion of legibility, we are now looking at these places as having been parsed by the government – as financial entities. Thus, the troubles of businesses should have been legible to the government at least in financial terms. This is supported by the reality of aid being evaluated and distributed among these lines. Yet, the experience of my interlocutors shows that there still had not been substantial state action, and they dismissed the state out of hand, as a non-entity. Still, I never encountered anger toward government policy, as no expectations were there to be betrayed. Only the pub managed to secure aid via the furlough scheme, which I would thus infer was quite difficult to square with the requirements of the restaurant industry. For everyone else, nothing was expected, and nothing was received.

It has been suggested to me that it is actually very out of character for Swedish people to trust so little in their government. However, as I laid out in the dramatis personae, not many of my interlocutors were white ethnic Swedes, and – by virtue of working in food service – I would not categorize them as primarily middle class either. This might start to explain why

they deviated from the general expectation of having great faith in the government, though we will further explore the matter in chapter 3.

While I have so far presented those interlocutors who did not expect a helping hand from the government and were thus indifferent, others were very interested in what the government was doing, and someone who saw the hand of the government more than anyone else was the owner of the pub. His understanding of the pandemic, and of customer numbers in particular, involved a lot of talk about what would make people afraid, including shifts in government rhetoric that had kept people afraid and in their homes[7].

Besides this, he also offered me the closest account of customer numbers during the pandemic. The first month, after the 15th of March, people stayed home, to return to businesses only slowly over the following months, and much more over summer (particularly with his place). Then, in late November, the aforementioned shift in government rhetoric happened, as well as the eight-person-rule – he seemed to think the cause lay more with the change in rhetoric though, putting him at odds with Joe's and Jack's general dismissiveness toward policy that did not rely on binding rules.

Another major element of policy impact were, the restrictions proper. Herb was talking worriedly about the 22:00 alcohol curfew and how it had cut into their revenue. Interestingly, it had been Joe who had initially pointed me toward Herb's place, since he knew that they had previously been open far past the time of the curfew before it had been imposed, suggesting that they might have been hit hard by it. This seems, representative, to me, of my interlocutors (even Joe) recognizing that the government as a powerful agent. For that to be understood as congruent with their dismissal of government in other situations, that dismissal must be read as specific to the idea that the government can and will help *them*, as opposed to the government's general ability to act effectively.

Cori, however, offered a view that fundamentally doubted just how much agency the government really had. When she was talking about poor customer numbers, she saw the cause far more with the news as opposed to governmental rhetoric, which she said had painted Stockholm and Uppsala as hotzones when the second wave was just beginning, and it was surging there first. Paralleling this, the government was never described to me as overreaching. While this may be partially attributable simply to interviewer effects, I would suggest that it also may be due to government response being, at its fastest, in lockstep with

[7] Some details here were over my head and over my language ability, but the broad points came through.

virus surges, as opposed to ahead of them, showing no proactiveness and aligning somewhat with Cori's view.

Similar to Cori's inability to separate government recommendations from the more general flow of events, there is another odd conflation that I want to draw attention to. In a rapid-fire interview with Cam at the vegan coop, he complained to me that they were always on the applying side, whether it was for a grant by their insurance company, or aid from the government for past months of lost business. In this context, he seemed to relate to both in the exact same way. Particularly when rent was discussed, he was not the only one. When discussing their financial situation, many seemed to talk about taxes and rent in about the same way, conflating the state with the other powerful institutions to which they owed their expenses. So, the government faded into the background. Be it by being seen as merely acting out their part of current events, or by becoming just another creditor, it was quite different from the powerful agent others saw. And, since those who held such views seemed to ground them in their own area of experience and expertise, they offer a strong opposing, or perhaps even complementary perspective to those who saw clear power and agency.

In addition to my interlocutors' understandings of the part the government played in their lives, I have some of my own observations as well. At the coop, they were a very international lot, and were drawing on a lot of perspectives to inform their approach. Yet, in conversation with Cori, when I had been asking a lot about safety procedure at a point, and she seemed to feel like she needed to justify their approach, she pointed out that what they were doing was already more than they were required to by the government. And, she was not the only one that thought like this. When I was talking to the owner of the pub, and he was explaining how he had completely independently assembled the safety concept for his place, he praised it with that same comparison, saying that it went beyond what was required by the government. Of course, they were not the only ones that drew on this comparison – it came up with more – but they had been trying to evade the comparison and shape their approach in relative independence yet, ultimately, the government's regulations were the standard against which they measured themselves.

In this, I actually see the government's finger on the scale when it comes to aesthetic pressure. While I maintain my previous point that the observers which must be satisfied are the customers, it seems like this standard is pushing people more toward erasing the pandemic visually and creating a sense of normality since it does not push for visually striking measures, or even measures which disrupt the regular experience of customers.

Returning to the analogy with Scott's state-imposed aesthetics, we are looking to understand whether the government created the pressure to present a certain aesthetic to customers. However, in Sweden, the relationship between state and business is not one of direct control. And, while I have outlined heretofore how the state has shaped norms and expectations, I see this exertion of power as too timid to warrant comparison to Scott's violently overreaching state. Instead, I found that the pressure which pushed businesses to conform to customers' expectations came from elsewhere.

When the pandemic began, there seemed to be a question in the air at the vegan coop about whether to stay open at all. I am not privy to the details of these considerations, nor relating conversations, but knowing even only the roughest outline of their finances, I know that this was not a possibility that would have involved re-opening afterwards – their monthly obligations on the loan used to buy the place needed to be met to a minimum, and while that minimum could be negotiated down, suspending it was not an option that was made available. Further expenses still were owed to the housing cooperative, which had actively refused to negotiate on the monthly payments.

With all these pieces in place, the idea of simply suspending operation for the duration of the pandemic was not feasible, and as much was likely clear at the time to anyone who had an understanding of how long the pandemic would rage[8]. I do not know the details of that fundamental discussion. What I do know, however, is that, in lieu of the beginning of the pandemic, some members stopped working. And so, the economic circumstances had turned a choice between staying open and closing into a choice between staying open and abstention though absence. The members who were left afterwards were forced to do the only thing they could do, and continued operations.

Conclusion

This, finally, completes the picture. Businesses lost income when customers stayed home, perhaps because they are following regulations, or because they were more worried due to the news. Furthermore, curfews removed the for some vital income of late alcohol sales. Government aid was lackluster, or not targeted toward restaurants' employment practices. Still, businesses needed to satisfy their creditors. Their only option for survival was money from customers, which usually requires them to come in. Thus, they needed to be persuaded.

[8] One of the board members has a master's degree on global health, and, at the time, the discovery of a vaccine in record time was by absolutely no means a given.

A few attempted to create visually striking (and likely actually successful) safety concepts to do so[9]. However, with the government offering little guidance on maintaining clear high safety, most opted to visually erase the pandemic to entice customers, producing the aesthetics of the pandemic.

The absence of direct and overt coercion may also have produced the complicated ways in which people saw the pandemic. While it seemed to be fairly uncontested that little help was to be expected from the government[10], views were more split with regard to whether the government's restriction and rhetoric were given any real consideration. Moreover, those who gave their impact thought were in turn split on whether they were impactful, or were merely keeping pace with events, implying an underlying understanding of the government as just another actor being swept along in the flow of events. Since I have laid out in my understanding of how the government sets and affects the standards to which people hold their safety measures, it will not be a surprise that I do not entirely share this view. However, what has become clear in examining how people saw and experienced the government is a particular relationship with the government, and with the powerful institutions that acted on their lives more generally: All were seen as distant, indifferent, faceless, and imposing.

[9] This worked for the sushi place because they captured a fundamentally different customer group, one which valued safety very highly. However, they also had the benefit of an established loyal customer base. Widespread adoption of their safer approach would likely have meant losing revenue from dine-in customers while gaining access to the probably smaller amount of people who were not already ordering takeout and needed additional safety to be reassured into doing so, and thus could not have been a solution for everyone.

[10] There were those who wanted more action, particularly in stopping the virus – they just didn't have much faith that this would actually come to pass.

The emotional labor of working through the pandemic

Where we have looked so far at the role of distant powers in people's lives, we have not actually centered day-to-day experience, and what the demand for an aesthetic of safety and reassurance looked like there. To better understand the regular experiences of interlocutors, I use Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labor. We start with a definition:

> [Emotional] labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others[.] This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality. (Hochschild, 2012, p.7).

Using this concept, we will explore what the need to reassure customers looks like in the regular working practices of my interlocutors.

On my second to last interview, Jack mentioned something that brought me back to the very beginning. We were discussing masks, and instructions around them, and he mentioned that, thankfully, nobody had come inside wearing a mask only to then take it off. In my very first conversation from before the fieldwork proper with Kathleen, she had voiced a similar concern, about someone obviously sick coming in. To me, this appears to represent an inconspicuous way to speak about anxieties regarding the riskiness of the job. Moreover, Kathleen mentioned having similar conversations among the staff. A key piece of emotional labor, then, appears to be dealing with those anxieties and uncertainties, alone or together, in a way that does not unnerve customers.

In light of this, I want to highlight an important parallel between Hochschild and Scott's theories: The primacy of the customers as observers. Arguably, it is more insidious here, since here, economic pressure does not just influence outside facing aesthetics, but is out to reach "a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality" (Hochschild, 2012, p.7), and adjust it, lest one becomes unfit for work. This brings us to an in-depth look at the potential for harm in emotional labor (though Hochschild notably does see emotional labor as intrinsically bad). A critical piece of her work is connecting emotional labor to alienation, with one key argument being that emotional labor coming from a deeply personal place makes alienation particularly devastating when it disturbs people on that personal and intimate level.

Alienation, or, as Hochschild prefers to say, estrangement, is, in turn, a function of doing such personal labor at another's behest when the ability to set personal boundaries required to do the work safely on one's terms is compromised. Her example for this is an increase in strain on stewardesses in lieu of a company speedup that undermines their ability to take the time to do their work properly (2012, p.132ff). My next concern thus is to find out whether this is a parallel to the COVID pandemic, or whether workers could work through their concerns on their own terms.

When I spoke to the owner of the pub, I asked if he was concerned about his own health, and he answered faster and more earnestly than I expected, that they were always afraid, always uneasy. Yet, just as quickly he moved on to what I could only understand to be an attempt to reassure me, saying that many there had tested positive for antibodies. Likely, having that conversation in his restaurant with his employees working there was something he saw as running counter to his providing a calm and reassuring presence. What also shone through, however, was that, despite his fear, he understood both his and his staff's safety and emotions as secondary to some obligation they had to their customers.

Another conversation like this was with Kathleen, in the final phone call of the fieldwork. She told me about customers that would come in and make small talk about COVID, how it was going in the coop, and the like. COVID small talk has become a quite pervasive feature of everyday conversation now, but for her, it meant something very different. By coming to dine in during the pandemic, customers were placing themselves at risk, but her position as a service worker, and their need to stay afloat, required her to pretend that they weren't, and to make small talk about working service during the pandemic as if it was normal and safe despite herself. This mirrored the greater dilemma the restaurant was experiencing, where she felt that they had been put in an impossible place where they had to decide between staying open despite things not being safe, and closing their doors forever.

In all other parts of her life, she was trying to be very safe. She felt a responsibility to her roommates in addition to her own concerns about COVID, and she was trying to be safe in all other areas of her life from dating to getting groceries and had made substantial cutbacks and sacrifices. Yet, when it came to work, she had few options but to simply stop thinking about safety.

What comes through here quite clearly is that food service workers were not able to navigate the situation on their own terms. Kathleen and the pub's owner both ended up

subordinating their own concerns and safety to the need to make customers feel that things were normal. Simply coping with these systemically imposed priorities was one part of the emotional labor of the pandemic, and the other was reassuring the customers.

With this, we can draw a clear parallel to Hochschild's example: A field where emotional labor is part of the work being thrown into upheaval, resulting in regular work suddenly becoming more strenuous. As for the harm and alienation Hochschild found in her study, my findings certainly feature occasional outbursts of worry and exasperation, but I personally had no contact with anyone who had fully burned out, or who mentioned having suffered long term consequences of COVID (though many had caught it), though this might have been a thing of chance, or of interlocutors being more closed off about such things.

Naturalized power structures and benign emotional labor obligations

In looking at alienation, we have primarily engaged with the Marxist thrust of Hochschild's theory. However, there also is a feminist component (2012, p.162ff) to her work, which stresses that emotional labor is heavily gendered. Later studies drawing on her work develop this to highlight that emotional labor, while skilled (Steinberg and Figart, 1999, p.14f), is nevertheless often invisible (1999, p.13) and under- or uncompensated (1999, p.21). These components are linked, and stem from the fact that the social status of women puts them in a position where they must learn, and are subsequently expected to accommodate the "displaced feelings of others". That expectation, in turn, is leveraged (Hochschild, 2012, p.163) to not only have them perform such work, but to also hide the fact that it is labor under the guise of it being a natural part of femininity, undermining the expectation of compensation in return. We will further explore the wage developments during the pandemic soon, but suffice to say that they were not marked by widespread increases to account for the additional labor.

Before moving on, I want to focus on the role of preexisting hierarchies and statuses in creating a situation where such immense demands of emotional labor could be made of certain groups. In the literature, there is some connecting emotional labor to hierarchical arrangements (Steinberg and Figart, 1999, p.12; Hochschild, 2012, p.163; Graeber, 2011, p.105ff), and the way Hochschild conceptualizes this is in terms of "feeling rules" which involve "establishing the sense of entitlement or obligations that governs emotional exchanges" (2012, p.56). With her focus on gender, this is exemplified by a general expectation of acquiescence by women toward men. She presents an example of using these rules to foist more labor onto people of certain groups with airlines using suggestive

advertising, which helped build a sexualized image and subsequent expectations of conduct toward stewardesses (p. 92ff).

Applying this logic to my field, I will present some examples of the benign culture of acquiescence and accommodation which underlies hospitality work to convey a sense of the existing culture, which I am arguing was leveraged to place the burden of creating an illusion of normality on food service workers. However, in arguing that hierarchies and cultural forms which underlie hospitality paved the way for additional labor to be foisted upon them, I am not saying that there is something fundamentally wrong with hospitality work. In fact, the examples I am about to present suggest that, while there is certainly an element of hierarchy and habitualized expectation to hospitality, it was by no means just a burden to my interlocutors, but both pleasant and seemingly natural in their eyes.

For instance, Cori mentioned missing the customer interaction that she'd had working the counter previously, and that it had given her a sense of connection to both the place and to the people. In a very similar vein, Kathleen lamented the emptiness of the place that had taken hold, and how a bustling feeling of community had been lost as the seats had become more and more empty. Beyond this, hospitality was nearly second nature to many of my interlocutors. Three times, at Herb's place, I was offered a beverage. Once, I refused – an odd habit of mine – and Herb, who had been offering, was quite noticeably taken aback, offering me other options, and being quite uncomfortable with my reaction (something that seemed to permeate the rest of that particular visit), and later, when I had the presence of mind to accept his offer, he was far more at ease with me. The same happened with the student holding the fort at the bagel place, too, where, once again he seemed at ease, or perhaps sure in his role as a host, after having sat me down, brought me coffee, and made pleasant conversation for a while.

I hope these examples have helped to illustrate not only some of the unwritten rules of hospitality, but also that they were seen, in and of themselves, as utterly benign. Despite the commercial setting, my interlocutors did not feel that they were being exploited, and some spoke about hospitality as paid labor in clear and positive terms. Of course, this is not a complete survey of the situation. I mentioned in the beginning that not everyone wanted to talk to me, and it is common knowledge that much service work involves dealing with demanding and unpleasant people at times. Nevertheless, my interlocutors seemed to have an overall positive takeaway.

It took the stresses of the pandemic, and the burden of maintaining a sense of normality foisted on them, to sour their feelings about the work substantially, and it seems likely that this worked because it functionally just expanded their pre-existing obligation to be accommodating to customers, despite this having become far more arduous, alienating work under the pandemic.

Chapter 3

The anthropological theory of disaster: Vulnerability

Who shoulders the burden, and why?

Vulnerability theory, a subset of the disaster literature

By now, Scott's view of the state has given us a broad understanding of the state's limitations when it comes to helping my interlocutors, and, in conjunction with emotional labor theory, an understanding of how this forces restaurants into an economic bind which coerces from them aesthetic adaptations and heavily increased emotional labor. However, Scott offers us little help in understanding why these people in particular have to do such demanding work, and while emotional labor does prompt us to look at social statuses and obligations leveraged to put this labor onto specific groups, a full picture is outside of the scope of her theory.

To more fully examine these relationships of status and power, we turn to the anthropological literature on disaster, beginning with its dominant approach: Vulnerability theory. The first key piece of literature here is *The Angry Earth* (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2020). In a chapter thereof, Lois Stanford and Robert Bolin (2020) synthesize previous works into a fairly comprehensive approach to vulnerability. They state that…

> …[d]efining vulnerability in terms of people's capacity to avoid, cope with, and recover from disasters draws attention to their living conditions, social and economic resources, livelihood patterns, and social power. While physical exposure to risk is a necessary element in vulnerability, it is people's lack of capacities that transform an environmental hazard into a disaster. (Stanford and Bolin, 2020, p.98)

In their work, they analyze such capacities primarily by looking at resources, drawing on earlier analysis (Wisner and Luce, 1993). In doing so, they include "a variety of material and social assets, including finances, information, social support networks, income opportunities, legal rights, and political power" (Stanford and Bolin, 2020). This serves to make the abstract capacities to deal with and be protected from disaster more tangible.

The next big element of vulnerability theory is to look at these circumstances as socially created. For a concise formulation of the proposition, I cite Kenneth Hewitt, who originated this view. He posits that

> effective or ineffective means to avoid or reduce risk [] depend upon the ongoing organisation and values of society and its institutions. […] Most natural disasters, or

> most damages in them are *characteristic* rather than accidental features of the places and societies where they occur. (Hewitt, 2020b, p.25 emphasis added.).

Stanford and Bolin present some common traits, which might influence the distribution of resources which in turn would offer effective ways to reduce risk: Class, gender, race/ethnicity, age, language and literacy, residency status, and political ideology (Stanford and Bolin, 2020, p.101ff). Language and residency status[11] have not been detrimental to my interlocutors, but all other points apply. An addendum is also necessary on the point of class. Stanford and Bolin conceptualize class exclusively as material wealth, and while I don't want to alter their definitions, this creates the need to separately consider occupation, because it allows us to emphasize work which places people in harm's way (which could refer to hospital work or other disaster response work, but here is about food service).

Some of the literature highlights the marginalized people most affected banding together after having been disproportionately affected to decry the injustice underlying such uneven distribution of power, resources, and subsequently harm (Barrios, 2017, p.155; Jones and Murphy, 2009, 2015; Kroll-Smith and Brown-Jeffy, 2013). Drawing on that, I will refer to the above set of factors which distribute resources upwards and damages from calamity downwards as 'lines of social stratification' when I am talking about the whole, rather than a particular item from the list.

Following the lines of stratification

In light of this, we should look at the demographics of my interlocutors. I have outlined them in detail with the dramatis personae, so I will reiterate them only briefly. The first eye-catching facet is *ethnicity*. Only the vegan coop had a few members that I read as white ethnic Swedes, while everyone else (outside the second and third pizza places, which were ambiguous) was a first or second generation immigrant. *Occupation* is, unsurprisingly, another uniform feature among my interlocutors, though there were of course differences between roles[12]. However, Cori was the only person I spoke to who did not work with customers at least indirectly. Vis a vis *age*, frontline workers were usually younger, while owners tended to be older. *Gender* was visible insofar that more men were owners than women. *Class*, or at least, wealth, was quite opaque. I speculate that the workers, and

[11]This refers specifically to whether someone is in the country legally, and potentially at risk of deportation if they are not.
[12] Since the coop complicates a straightforward worker – owner dichotomy, I ended up talking about frontline work and administrative work in this paper.

particularly students were poorer, and the owners tended to be wealthier, but it is hard to discern with accuracy.

With these demographics, we can now start to understand the vulnerability pattern before us. To start with, a non-social aspect: The relationship between age and chance of death. Though none had died (as far as I knew), this did very evidently concern at least the owners of the sushi place very much, as they were older, and trying to be very safe. Other owners seemed less aware of or perhaps more resigned to the possibility. However, given mounting reports on the lasting effects of COVID, death is not the only health risk it poses.

This leads me into the core vector of vulnerability for my work: occupation. Medical personnel responding directly to the disaster, for instance, are bound to be at risk, and choose to do so to mitigate greater harm[13]. Food service workers share similar risks: Their work cannot be done from home, and on top of this they often interact with people[14] face to face, people who were, for a long time, not urged to wear facemasks.

In the field, this was avoidable for some (I heard of multiple people quitting in lieu of the pandemic), but the ability to do so is predicated on having resources to quit; perhaps social support, or wealth. However, with owners, money was still not enough. After all, their wealth was likely in the restaurant, and their livelihood was likely tied to the continuing operation of their business. Another factor which showed among my interlocutors was a migratory background. At a larger scale, the documented financial disadvantages of people like them in Sweden (Nordin and Rooth, 2009) likely diminished that group's ability to opt out of service jobs. Beyond that, it is hard to say that people quitting have amounted to a structural effect: With the greatest wave of unemployment in recent history, others with more dire economic circumstances may well feel the economic pressure to take on the freed up positions[15].

Building on the literature

Having examined the threats to physical wellbeing, the most straightforward application of vulnerability theory is done, and there are some points where I will depart from the literature going forward. As cited, Hewitt speaks about natural disasters, and that is because disaster theory historically has been interested in what they call 'geophysical' phenomena: Earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. However, looking at disasters as something which

[13] For a more focused work, a finer distinction would likely be appropriate, since the amount of human contact in care work seems to be heavily structured along class (and gender) lines between doctors and nurses.
[14] Of course, their contact with the public is less likely to be infectious than patient contact.
[15] The coop presents an outlier here: They were looking to hire more, but could not offer substantial pay.

can only exist when the conditions within society have left some people so vulnerable that an environmental hazard is devastating is an approach that should encompass far more than just disasters initiated by geophysical hazards. This view aligns with recent scientific debates around the emergence of the anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin, 2015), which posit that we live in a fundamentally human-dominated epoch and categorically undermines the idea that nature and society can be considered separately. Fully integrating that view into vulnerability theory would mean that nearly any environmental hazard causing widespread disaster would fall under the purview of vulnerability theory.

Now, with COVID, we are looking for good ways to understand a in many ways unprecedented phenomenon, and my work so far should demonstrate the applicability and value of vulnerability theory. Going forward, I will expand this and explore the previously unimportant aspect of disaster duration through comparison to other literature, but also to extrapolate from the core concepts of the vulnerability literature.

In this, I will at points conflate the economic effects of COVID with the pandemic itself at points. Though this is not entirely unfamiliar to disaster literature, which does concern itself with how livelihoods can be lost, it gains a new weight due to the continuous financial attrition caused by COVID. In highlighting economic effects, we integrate this and further center the socially constituted element of disasters (Oliver-Smith, 2020b).

With these departures laid out, we turn to something I've repeatedly touched on now: The implications of a disaster having a duration as long as COVID. This will be a key theme for the rest of this thesis, and we begin examining it here through the lens of vulnerability.

Though the definition I initially cited highlights the "capacity to avoid, cope with, and recover from disasters" (Stanford and Bolin, 2020, p.98) as key to vulnerability theory, the disasters commonly written about have not prompted equal focus on all three. Within the realm of disasters, there is no real modern precedent for a protracted hazard like COVID[16], and this leaves us with a gap in the literature. So, what does vulnerability theory tell us when we are not looking at avoiding or recovering from disasters, but at the time during? How does the capacity to cope and endure manifest?

First, I would like to pick up the point from the beginning of this chapter and point out that, if vulnerabilities arise from the regular operation of society, resources have to be distributed unevenly in that time. In this, I make a similar argument to a political economy

[16] Literature on civilian life in times of war will offer us some help with this later, but for now I hope to demonstrate that the theory underlying the disaster literature is sound enough to take it into this direction.

perspective in crisis and disaster literature which argues that disasters reveal the nature and contradictions of society, at least to the strata most affected, using the term "crise revelatrice" (Barrios, 2017, p.154f) [17]. Drawing on this, and on Hewitt, I am making the case that the organization and values of society can be made out more clearly during it and that they will likely continue to be upheld during the crisis.

Referring back to the chapters on government and the economy, we know that the flow of money toward these restaurants was disrupted, and that help from the government was slow, unreliable, and/or contingent on being legible to the government in a particular way. However, recalling the aid the pub gained in becoming legible, we know that powerful aid was made available, but that it was primarily aimed toward preserving a different (likely more middle-class) type of employment relationship. For restaurants and their workers, not being included meant being pushed to continue to take on the health risks of working through the pandemic. Those benefitting from the financial duress food service businesses were put under were those who had been able to move to work-from-home arrangements while maintaining the ability to eat out or order.

On the topic of who benefitted, however, those enjoying the convenience of available takeout or 'normal' eating continuing are likely only peripheral. In discussing the creation of coercive economic pressure in the context of Scott, we found that, while income faltered, expenses barely did. The continued operations served in part to be able to continually satisfy the financial obligations to institutions collecting literal and figurative rents, leaving them protected while the largely unmitigated burden of pandemic losses was left on these small businesses.

It is at this point that I want to return to Kenneth who posited that "effective or ineffective means to avoid or reduce risk are found to depend upon the ongoing organization and values of society and institutions", and that "[m]ost natural disasters, or most damages in them are *characteristic* rather than accidental features of the places and societies where they occur" (2020b, p.25 emphasis added).

So, what are the values and characteristics at play here? Certainly, the health, safety, and livelihoods of my interlocutors seemed to be subordinated to the finances of their landlords and creditors. On the government's side, people in certain employment relationships

[17] Barrios here summarizes a wider literature (Oliver-Smith, 1996; Faas and Barrios, 2015; Sahlins, 2017; Solway, 1994).

were targeted with more aid than those in more precarious employment, which also had the knock-on effect of keeping their places of business open to those who had been receiving greater governmental support[18]. However, in keeping with Hewitt, I do not aim to present this as a conscious effort; it was likely simply the result of the values and organization of society continuing as usual.

Yet, even that leaves us with the implication that much of the status quo was kept in place for financial gain, or the convenience of more valued social groups. But, while the findings certainly suggest that these are factors, there is another element which I first noted in closing out my discussion of how people seemed to view the government in the chapter 2. There, I pointed out that my interlocutors mainly seemed to view the government as distant, faceless, and imposing, and, given what this chapter suggests about the priorities of the powers that be, there seems to be a lot of grounded experience to explain that perspective.

Furthermore, comparisons to other countries increasingly suggest that the pandemic was preventable at multiple steps, including national response (The independent panel for pandemic preparedness and response, 2021). Thus, the prioritization of certain groups over others cannot account for all the decisions taken that led to the pandemic taking the shape it did. I would suggest (tacitly, because I have not focused on the internals of the government's decision processes) that thus, the most plausible reason for the Swedish government to have taken the decisions they did (in addition to being short-sighted) is that it was easier for them to imagine an approach in which all suffered, but some suffered less, than an approach that shielded everyone, but particularly those least valued.

[18] This prioritization of certain groups presents a clear parallel to Mullard (2021).

Chapter 4

A comparison to war, a personal look at the experience of the pandemic, and an examination of how those who bear the greatest burden endure

The Crisis at the Coop

After a meager, though not disastrous summer, the second wave came, surging in Stockholm and Uppsala sooner than anywhere else. Recommendations came again, and government rhetoric turned dark. At the coop, meager paychecks from the month before were set to arrive, and they were looking at the end of a week that had been far worse than those of the month that had produced said meager paychecks. Throughout November, things did not get better, and Cori started to worry how they could go on. They had been enduring a crisis all summer, and they had been managing, though things were bad, but now the real crisis was here.

However, they were in for a brief windfall: December, the month of celebration and consumption, stabilized things, but it was not to last. In January, two members left, leaving them scrambling to fill the gaps and facing a month under the shadow of the second wave still, despite what they needed being, as Cori put it, more Decembers.

While an unexpected wave and severe government rhetoric had signaled the decline in business starting November, January was when things started to feel personal. Two members stopped working, and one of them was a cook. Those left were scrambling to find a replacement, but they were already worn down by the strain of a bad year. When things were breaking, it no longer felt like a normal inconvenience, but a little bit of chaos breaking in, hitting morale. It felt like being on a sinking ship, Kathleen told me. Like they were shoveling water, but never able to plug the hole.

In the process, the content of the work changed. There was always something to do, still, but something was missing. Things had felt cozy and bustling in years before, despite the winter's long and dark nights, but with the customers staying away, so did the atmosphere, and the work was lonelier than it once had been.

Meanwhile, Kathleen had gotten a promotion. By sheer virtue of attrition, she had come to be in charge of shift planning, and she began to feel the restless burden of responsibility. It was hard now to step out of the constant stream of minor troubles and greater uncertainties to sit, and think, and reflect. For Cori, this was the reality, too, but far more materially. There was no financial room to maneuver, and use the quiet time for renovations. Rather, they needed to stay open, so that they might capture what business there was left.

For better or worse, the members of the coop shared in these setbacks. When their pay sank, it sank for all. When bad news came about, they commiserated. Yet, they were also

cautious, never quite saying out loud that they might close, only ever skirting around the possibility. Cori, who saw the finances up close, was particularly disciplined, always staying calm and coolheaded.

Still, this was wearing on her. We spoke twice, and the first time, she had confidently told me that she had a great eye for news, spotting relevant details whenever she came across them. When we spoke again, she returned to the topic, only this time, her confidence was all but gone. Though she presented herself as merely giving greater detail, the subtext of her story had changed: What had been about experience and good instincts before now was about a deliberate process of mental note-taking and further research, which often turned up nothing at all. What had been about earned confidence now was about disappointments, uncertainty about her abilities, and about confidence lost to the continuous onslaught of chaos.

War as an analogue for the pandemic

The notion that the pandemic is like a war, though a modestly common rhetorical device, is one I encountered multiple independent times as a comparison. The first was in conjunction with the oversight of the fieldwork, which was handled by Ivana Maček. In discussing what I was encountering in the field, she began to draw connections to her findings doing fieldwork in Sarajevo as it lay under siege. Particularly the concept of normality seemed applicable and apt to her.

The second time was at the yugo bar, with Herb. He had witnessed that same war and compared the behavior of a friend to those times: He was very afraid, and stayed inside at length. Though he did not offer more examples, this deepened my desire to investigate.

Finally, I encountered the work of Teresa Koloma Beck in my readings, a German sociologist who had done work in and after war in Angola, Mozambique, and Afghanistan, and who has noted, and written about, the similarities between war and the pandemic, and in doing so highlighted the importance of continuing everyday lives.

Between Maček and Koloma Beck, there is a strong overlap between the ideas of everyday life and normality. Both are important in that they give people a sense of control over their lives. For Maček, this normal life is a normative ideal which people aspire to (2007, p.39), and which they can only reach through negotiation with the ideal (2007, p.40), which lets them and deal with disturbances by incorporating them into a new definition of normality. As this negotiation is not only internal, but can have outside (potentially institutional) elements, there is also a distinctly political element to it.

For Koloma Beck, the key factor is routine, or habit, and her work centers the body as a place where 'knowledge' of everyday routines can give a vital sense of agency if they are appropriately adapted and continually available to be acted out (2020). Through such adaption, new knowledge about the situation becomes incorporated, enacted, and embodied.

Though they approach the matter from somewhat different angles, both authors posit that this normal everyday life first of all, gives stability, second, is where disruption is most often felt, and third, is where the shocks of disruption can be adapted to, and resisted.

This leads us to their next point, which is how they conceptualize disruption. Koloma Beck spends understands disruptions to be elements of a crisis that cause breaks in experience (2020, p.466) which upend habits that usually function in near automation, before conscious reflection (2020, p.455). Thus, they force adaption (2020, p.466).

Since Koloma Beck uses the term crisis, it needs to briefly be addressed. Historically, the notion of crisis has been associated with moments of social change in traditions from the Hegelian to the Marxist/Materialist (Barrios, 2017). In keeping with that logic, she does voice an expectation of great social change in lieu of COVID, though that is tangential to her core point.

Instead of breaks in experience, Maček speaks about disruptions of normality in terms of chaos breaking in. Drawing on her fieldwork in Sarajevo, she presents two aspects of this. The first major element she discusses is what it means to live in constant uncertainty, as utilities were coming on at effectively random intervals, which made daily routine impossible. This was eventually interpreted as not only being the fault of the government, but also as an intentional bullying tactic. Yet, when utilities returned, it was an opportunity to return to a previously normal standard of living. With it came what Maček describes as "complete subordination to the whims of destiny, or the authority[.] The message that slowly but surely engraved itself into people was that they had no power over their lives" (2007, p.42f). Once money began running out, this situation caused people to have a deep sense of shame about the need to rely on (mostly foreign) aid. However, as time went on, the shame and humiliation gave way to a new normality, a re-negotiation which had been necessitated by the change in circumstances (2007, p.44). From my reading, this effect of broken normality operates primarily in terms of time, in that its deleterious effect on the ability to have a normal life is a function of the future possibility of repeated disruption.

The other aspect of such breaches I want to highlight in Maček's work is drawn in turn from Caronyn Nordstrom and Joann Martin (1992, pp.261, 267f), and concerns the experience

of the breach as present in the moment, characterizing it as a brief sense of ontological and epistemological vacuum that persists until normality is re-established (Maček, 2007, p.40). These periods, she explains, serve a function in their own right, giving people time off from the otherwise persistent task of continuously re-establishing normality (p. 53f).

On the silence about death and COVID aftereffects

One topic which is glaringly absent from my material is any mention of death, or the potential long term effects of COVID. This is not exactly surprising – I thought it inappropriate to broach such sensitive matters with relative strangers. Accordingly, the only conversation which came close is the previously mentioned conversation with Kathleen about avoiding COVID in all areas of her life but work, and even there, the discussion is tacit.

Still, our theories somewhat equip us to briefly survey the matter. Koloma Beck, in fact, specifically addresses this topic. Routines which attempt to address the physical hazard, she argues, function as unconscious memento mori, and the subsequent general consciousness of death must eventually be processed by a society looking to recover (Koloma Beck, 2015, p.464). I believe that the many earnest but casual discussions of personal experience with COVID I have had in and outside the field represent early examples of this process.

A more sobering perspective comes from applying Maček's idea of normality. Arbitrary infection and death, or long term impairment in one's personal life, present perhaps the ultimate threat of chaos breaking in. I remember laying restless one long night trying to grapple with the risks before deciding against regular movement on public transit and reorienting my field. Hence, I know such intensely personal negotiation about navigating risks from experience.

The burdens on frontline workers during COVID

Equipped now with a broad understanding of the problems workers faced, as well as the analogy of war, we can now turn to a personal view of the problems people on the ground faced. I will divide this discussion by roles, i.e. the overlapping categories of administrator and frontline worker. In this section, we look at the worker side.

At the vegan coop, employees were not paid a fixed salary, and workers were not called employees. Wages, instead, were dependent on profits. In good times, this meant that all the profits were being passed down to the workers, and they prided themselves on it. Specifically, wages were calculated via a base value, which was then adjusted based on how well the coop had done. Functionally, these seemed to simply be distributional weights, allocated for each hour worked, differentiated by tasks. Since the coops fixed costs were subtracted from revenue, and only the rest could be distributed after, even smaller decreases in revenue were felt in wages in an amplified manner, and they were only paid peanuts. This was unsustainable in the long term, which had become clear when yet more members quit in January, which, Cori said, was the first time they had lost members specifically due to the pandemic, as opposed to mixed reasons. Throughout this, it became clear to me that, while their contributions in terms of shared finance strain and labor represented one burden they shared, there was another: The health cost[19] of strained finances and ongoing general crisis.

As a worker, Jack was most worried about his material wellbeing, and started thinking about a second job. So, he was somewhat exasperated when hearing they were looking at poor developments in wages, but overall he was far from being seriously perturbed, despite everything. Even as the coop lost members, he wasn't going to lose his cool. Being from Romania, middle aged, and having moved around a lot, he was familiar with far worse problems, though he didn't specify exactly what. The troubles of the coop were "first world problems", and that was that.

However, beyond life experience, there also seemed to be some mixture of trust and ignorance at work: While he cheerfully told me that they were awash in applicants, with a years' worth of applications in their email inbox, and that the issue with the other cook quitting was really as good as solved, Kathleen, who had ended up in charge of this process, was far less certain. I got the impression that, to some extent, Jack must've been aware of this: He did mention that such new applicants often didn't understand that they'd applied to a coop,

[19] I do not distinguish between mental and physical health on purpose, as the distinction is likely deceptive to make here, considering the serious physical strain of stress, which nonetheless would generally be considered a mental cost.

something Kathleen brought up in phrasing that struck me as remarkably similar, and seemed like, in those contexts, a euphemistic way to say that these applicants needed to have explained to them that they were in for some very poor pay. It seemed that, besides perspective, he kept his cool through a mixture of trust and selectively applied ignorance. Besides material concerns, this attitude could also be found elsewhere. I have already noted in talking about people's relationship to government how Joe and Jack were very disinterested in matters of policy, and later discussed those more interested in policy. Conversely, those keeping a closer eye on things were all administrative personnel.

So, it fits that Joe, being a front line worker with utter job security, was the most unconcerned of anyone I met. His father was handling the financial side, and he had expressed confidence that everything would be fine. This, of course, also somewhat reflects his place simply doing a lot better than the vegan coop[20].

Finally, at the corner café, I encountered a more curious case. I met two employees who somewhat differed in their outlook. The first, to whom I only spoke briefly, was the one who told me that while their pay hadn't been cut, their hours had been, and thus seemed slightly anxious. The second, however, was far more positive, and seemed proud, extolling the success of safety and hygiene procedures in having people still patronize them. She did, however, also seem to be on friendly or perhaps familial terms with the proprietor, suggesting that, if push came to shove, she would not be the first of the workers to feel consequences.

This leads me into a repeat point, regarding emotional labor. While it was not evidently wearing on all my interlocutors, we can carry this over from its previous discussion as another potential burden on people in customer interaction, and I adopted the term normality in discussing it in preparation for this discussion. I would argue, now, with the pieces of emotional labor, normality, and vulnerability in place, that specifically the burden of doing the emotional labor of maintaining a sense of normality for customers is redistributed downwards like so many other burdens during the pandemic, ending up in the hands of service workers.

With this, we have surveyed the main problems that frontline workers face during the pandemic. Guided by Maček's concept of normality, we can look to breaches of chaos in the moment, and to long term uncertainty. For the worker side, moments of chaos are smaller; like little inconveniences feeling like expressions of a crisis, and more mitigated, like workers

[20] Likely in part due to its loyal customer base of alcoholics.

quitting with the responsibility to hire replacements falling to others. What was more urgently felt by them was the long term uncertainty, which mainly showed as financial uncertainty, as well as downright financial strain. Jack, had dependants, and the many students in the industry did not have much financial maneuverability. However, worries about this could be somewhat ameliorated by trust if the organization warranted it, and some distance from the day-to-day of economic upheaval. Thus, while the uncertainty was there, it did not pierce as deep as it did for the people Maček worked with in Sarajevo. However, emotional labor was also necessitated and made more difficult by both smaller breaches of chaos and larger uncertainties, meaning more had to be emotionally processed by everyone, though especially by workers with frequent customer contact.

The burdens of responsibility, administration, and ownership

Having looked at the worker side, we now look at the burden on owners / administrators. In my conversations with Herb at the yugo bar, I would periodically ask about the topic of plans, curious about what he had done about the pandemic, what he was going to do – all to get a sense of how he saw and understood things. When the place was empty, Herb would talk quite freely about his frustrations, hopes, and slightly less freely about his worries. He would talk about the situation, and I would follow as much as my Swedish allowed, and one phrase stuck out to me, at least after the third repetition or so. “Vad kan man göra”, he’d say – what can you do, and more seldomly, “Vad ska man göra”; ‘what are you gonna do’, roughly translated. With more bad luck on the side of the restrictions than most, he was keenly aware of the agency he lacked to control his situation, and he would condense his frustrations into that rhetorical question.

As his formulation of the problem felt incisive, I brought it up when I was interviewing Cori for the first time, and it seemed to electrify her: “Precis, vad kan man göra!”, she went, taken briefly into Swedish. Follow the regulations, she listed, cut costs, and work hard despite the pay. However, even after having taken all conventional measures, they were still struggling. Hence, “Vad kan man göra!”

While a pervasive sense of powerlessness and uncertainty often shone through in conversation with some, it wasn’t a sign of immanent financial ruin. Of everyone I spoke to, the co-owner of the sushi place had done the best, financially. Yet, she hesitated for a moment before telling me that their finances were stable, even about the same as before. Impressed and excited, I pressed her for details, and quickly noticed that she did not share my

excitement. She explained that customers felt safe coming to them (they had a striking safety aesthetic, and taken strong measures), and that, with many working from home (and her being in a residential area), they were well positioned to have many takeaway orders still – they had stopped all in place dining for safety reasons. Later, she told me that she knew from her connections to the city that revenue there had collapsed 50-60%, and when I inquired as to her plans for the future, she told me she had none, saying that the future was too unpredictable. Not even her astounding success had given her peace of mind, and uncertainty lingered, with chaos lurking around the corner still, ready to take away what she had so long protected.

However, while some of my interlocutors were more clear-spoken, concerns were often understated and subtle, and often, they came through as much, if not more, when people spoke about their hopes for the future. One such conversation I had right around when the possibility of vaccines had started to turn from an uncertain possibility into something that was tangible, and underway. Herb (whose words I could follow about half the time) had talked about how the vaccine was six months away now, and later, when I asked about his ideas for the future, he was quite uncertain, but he kept saying that he was hoping for the vaccine; that they would just have to hold out until the vaccine.

With Kathleen, the hope was less about an end, but about a reprieve. Facing the return to poor revenue after the brief reprieve of December in mid January, her hopes were set on summer. However, she spelled out the uncertainty that underlies hope that Herb had left implicit: Summer, she said, was a break to look forward to, yet she was not at all sure how much it would help. Last summer had, after all, been meager (though better than winter), and thus, the next summer was by no means a sure thing.

Despite all of this stress, everyone with administrative responsibilities also tried to keep up with the news and policy. Cori in particular detailed an entire methodology for this, the owner of the pub had mentioned having done research to figure out their hygiene/safety policy, the co-owner of the sushi place was following news in Swedish and Chinese, and the owner of the third pizza place mentioned keeping an eye on the newspapers. While being a necessity, this seemed to force them to continuously face the looming uncertainty of the pandemic, and to create and further their general sense of powerlessness.

In summary, we have points of overlap and points of distinction between those with administrative responsibilities and more frontline workers. Both are affected by the financial uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, though their stakes look very different, with most

administrative people owning their businesses. However, while frontline workers do not have to confront the long term uncertainty as regularly, administrative work means keeping up with the continuous torrent of news, keeping track of battered finances, and coping with the pulls of hope and fear.

Drawing on Koloma Beck's stress on the importance of a sense of agency, we can quite clearly conceptualize this blatant and widespread uncertainty as a serious threat to it. As Cori lamented, all conventional cost-cutting measures had been applied, and they hadn't been enough. So, while everyone was working to understand what would happen next, they were doing so under the knowledge that they might not be able to do anything about it.

The overlap between solidarity and emotional labor

With this, we are starting to move towards discussing how people addressed these problems. However, there is one point that lies squarely between being a burden and a solution, and it relates to emotional labor and the image of calm and confidence some administrators tried to project.

I have previously mentioned that getting news from the city contributed to a sense of powerlessness with the co-owner of the sushi place, and she was not the only one. Many places had connections there, and heard how bad things were. The owner of the pub outright told me, in relaying the conditions there, that he was glad to be elsewhere. Knowing they were doing comparatively well seemed to have given both him and the sushi places' co-owner a certain stoic resolve. Cori, too, reminded me of this with her disciplined refusal to lose her cool.

This kind of attitude seemed to serve two functions. Evidenced by Cori, who spoke to me without an audience, this was important for them themselves, supplementing a feeling of control over the situation with control over the self, forcing a calm which helped people deal with the situation. With the sushi place, too, was I told that they would make it through, despite the contradiction with her refusal to speculate about the future. With confidence and experience having only gone so far, they could rely on nothing but their own determination.

However, they were not just putting a show on for themselves. This was particularly clear when I spoke to the pub owner in front of his staff, and he admitted that they all were afraid for their health before rushing the conversation along to stress that many of them had antibodies. Moreover, he seemed sincerely proud of his safety concept, and told me that they would make it through to the other side. While this tacit optimism was no doubt sincere, and

offered him some peace of mind, it also seemed geared toward keeping his employees resolute.

Though I noticed this more with administrators, I already noted a general effort to avoid talks of possible closing or bankruptcy before in laying out the crisis at the coop, which I would also consider efforts to manage the general mood. Speculating briefly, I would suggest that both supportive and more coerced internal management of such conversations is entirely to be expected, with the motivation for it likely depending on the culture of work in any particular place.

In the literature, organization-internal emotional labor mostly receives attention when it spans hierarchies. This goes both for the management of superiors' emotions and superiors' management of others' emotions (Steinberg and Figart, 1999, p.12), with only the latter being applicable here. Recalling my point at the end of my initial discussion of emotional labor, I want to reiterate that emotional labor is not inherently bad or exploitative. On the other hand, it's also worth remembering that emotional labor is labor, which requires effort and energy, meaning that, though I do not want to malign its presence in these situations, it must be understood as an added burden which stems from the pandemic. That being said, I do think that this does leave us with the question whether management involves researched and documented emotional labor and the maintenance of more equal relations is simply underappreciated in the literature, or whether, perhaps, there are better approaches to explore[21].

Literature perspectives on solidarity in war and after disaster

So, we fully reach our final major segment: Understanding how people cope with the various stresses of the pandemic. We begin by looking at two different ways in which the literature broaches emotion and solidarity. Picking up on the work of Maček once again, we find a brief discussion of emotional openness becoming normal.

> Naming or expressing the disruptions in one's normality was another way of resisting outside conditions and creating, or preserving one's norms. […] Somehow during the war it became commonly accepted that everybody felt fear, and this shared knowledge helped enormously in coping with it. (Maček, 2007, p.54f)

[21] I suspect the answer is both, but resign myself to the latter.

Though not theoretically heavy, she suggests a clear understanding of it as simply becoming integrated into normal social conduct, and helping profoundly. With this, she touches on some of the same points as Anthony Oliver-Smith, who we know from disaster literature.

Thus, we come to Oliver-Smith's *The Brotherhood of Pain* (2020a), and what he calls post-disaster solidarity. Drawing parallels to Victor Turner's work on rituals (2007), Oliver-Smith describes how situations which he compares to the liminal spaces created by ritual arise around disaster: Regular social statuses are suspended (Oliver-Smith, 2020a, p.235), as another status takes precedence. Before all else, everyone is a victim of disaster, and in this, they are equals (p. 233).

In this process, something which Turner calls *communitas* is produced. This is a shared consciousness, stemming from shared experiences in a shared position, particularly strong, emotional experiences. This shared emotional bond[22] is a major contributor to the formation of bonds of solidarity, and should be understood as acting in tandem with shared material self-interest among the victims (Oliver-Smith, 2020a, p.232f). In this, Oliver-Smith is arguing against the dominance of purely rationality-based understandings of solidarity, and continues the case for integrating these with emotional approaches. Deep emotional bonds across class and ethnic lines may also be in everyone's rational interest (2020a, p.232). Drawing on feminist work on emotion and epistemology, he posits that they provide an experiential grounding for values (2020a, p.233), which I take to imply that they are essential for experiences becoming meaningful first individually, and potentially, communally.

Still, solidarity around disasters is, by its nature, transient. When the situation loses its primacy, other factors regain relevance and temporarily suspended hierarchies may well be reasserted in, for instance, the distribution of aid, and be highlighted quite dramatically in the process. However, as multiple cases show, once established, such a spirit of solidarity may be called upon again when further challenges arise that necessitate (or can be constructed as necessitating) the action of the unified collective once again, so long as there is a shared obstacle or antagonist (Oliver-Smith, 2020a, p.237f). Though he lays out competing impulses, Oliver-Smith generally puts forward the claim that while such events may lay bare differences and divisions, they are often overridden by a response of solidarity. At time of writing, the pandemic is still ongoing, so questions about what will happen after are naturally beyond the scope of this work. Here, I want to apply this theory to the time during the ongoing disaster.

[22] The titular brotherhood of pain

Regarding the previously discussed vulnerability literature, this approach stands in some tension with it. Where vulnerability stresses division, post-disaster solidarity stresses the overcoming of divisions made visible by disaster. Oliver-Smith's piece discusses both, but without exploring this friction, and he acknowledges that sometimes communities do not come together, but are merely further eroded by disaster, noting that it is unclear why one or the other happens (2020a, p.236). With other parts of vulnerability theory being far more geared towards a very large scale understanding and post-disaster solidarity being about more clearly placed events and relations, I am content to let this modest friction be.

Coping through solidarity

As we begin looking at solidarity, I want to pick up a previous point on the circumstances places in the city found themselves in. This story seemed to be spreading in professional networks and, given how it informed the decision of many to stoically endure, this had offered some measure of emotional grounding, and seems to be quite akin to the emotional openness found in Maček's sarajevan work. It is also by far not the only example of people commiserating.

Recalling another earlier point, the workers of the coop shared in financial and emotional setbacks with one another. And, while some of them stopped taking on working hours as the financial strain took its toll, or at least, not all did, and they did not close their doors, despite wages becoming unsustainably low. Instead, the remaining members kept it open, functionally subsidizing its continued operations with their labor, and, more indirectly by relying more on CSN[23], savings, and other work to pay their own bills.

This raises the question why anyone stayed. A part was surely played by the contracting job market making alternatives scarce to nonexistent, but, when Jack was talking to me about the subject, he was not looking to leave, but to find a second job to pad his finances. Reflecting on my work and conversations with members of the coop, it strikes me just how identified they were with their work, for better or worse. This was key to understanding their continued commitment.

Some of their investment paradoxically came from their financial stake in how things were going. Kathleen, for instance, once told me that she felt the bad days at the counter quite harshly – after all, her pay was on the line directly and tangibly, very unlike she imagined it would have been at a large chain.

[23] Swedish student loans.

Another factor seemed to be participation. Kathleen in particular told me about her input in general meetings, which had for instance led to them having members not work for two weeks after having travelled. Moreover, the process of having everyone involved in meetings produced a feeling of commitment and ownership with all decisions, not just those based off of their own suggestions. For instance, when members were against wearing masks during work, a collective decision was reached that no one would wear one, for fear that customers might think those wearing them were sick if not all wore them, and all members carried that decision[24].

Where Kathleen was drawn in by participatory decision-making, Jack had more personal reasons: He held a deep disillusionment with professional life as he had experienced it working in construction in London. There, as he saw it, business consisted of little more than getting one over on another, and he did not like his job. Having left that life behind, he told me that he far preferred working a job he liked, even if it meant just making half as much money. We were cut short, but between directly providing a service to people, and doing so in a more egalitarian and ethically-minded organization, some of the coop's principles evidently spoke to him.

Cori, meanwhile, emphasized community. As the future of the coop seemed in jeopardy she stressed that they had a great team; and that they would love to continue working together. These bonds were not just among staff: Both Kathleen and Cori valued and missed connecting with customers, with Cori having had to take a step back and reduce her workload, and Kathleen experiencing the absence in her hours at the counter.

In all of this, we can quite clearly see the egalitarian, communitarian spirit described by Oliver-Smith, but there are also key differences. While he expects this to spontaneously come about through experience of calamity, here, it is only very partially due to the disaster. Instead, many of the prerequisites for this kind of solidarity seem to be inscribed into the cooperative structure of the business. This is also a particularly interesting case because, at least within the confines of the coop, material solidarity was not stopped by the difference in roles between people. I am less clear on how emotionally open things became, though. While I know that they commiserated to some extent, such as over a derisive Facebook post in a local vegan group, I don't know whether Kathleen spoke about the burden of emotional labor

[24] Recalling the point of aesthetics, it is evident here, too, and the pressure of the economic double bind forcing them to prioritize customer impressions above all else shows.

to the others, nor whether Cori hinting worriedly at the possibility of closing was the most she felt she could express her concerns with anyone.

A quite similar arrangement, which came under significantly less duress, was the family business of Joe's pizza place. They did not seem to have labor relations formalized, or at least not rigidly, and they were prepared to simply suffer the losses during the pandemic. Furthermore, his father worked a day job in addition to his semi-regular work at the restaurant, meaning they could subsidize themselves with diverse income streams within the family, and their own labor.

With them being a family business, there seem to be far fewer ideologically organized features furthering communal bonding, but some things stuck with me. When Joe had had COVID, his mother and brother filled in, at christmas, his mother had decorated the pizzeria, and all bookkeeping was handled by Joe's father. Moreover, there was one particularly memorable exchange with Joe. We had, somehow, arrived on the topic of work hours, and I had been taken aback by him laying out completely clearly that he worked ten plus hours a day, six days a week. He seemed amused by my reaction, though not surprised. Explaining, he said "With a place like this, you put your life into it." The conversation moved on, but his nonchalance stuck with me in light of one of our earliest exchanges. There, he had flinched at the idea that he might inherit the place and take over – people asked that a lot, he told me, but he wasn't too sure; he thought of it as more of a temporary commitment. Yet, despite its temporary nature, he evidently felt a deep attachment.

While it certainly makes sense to understand Joe's attachment to the restaurant in terms similar to the communal structures which so stuck out to me with the coop, an element I want to highlight here is embodiment. Koloma Beck uses it in her conceptualization of everyday life (2020), and it is also a generally well established theme in social science (Bourdieu, 2007; Connerton, 1989). The point I am after here is that habits, practice, or routine inscribe themselves in the body and in pre-conscious memory, creating memory and attachment which is not just of the mind, but of the whole body[25]. Here, this serves to make the case that this also applies to the nature of Joe's attachment to the pizza place he spends the majority of his waking hours running. Generalizing, and drawing on what we have seen with

[25] This is what Koloma Beck's previous argument that the pandemic will situate an understanding of death in many habitual practices draws on.

the members of the coop, I posit that this attachment is heavily facilitated by a clear material stake in and social connection to the business, which for Joe comes through family ownership.

Though Joe's was the only family business, they were not an outlier insofar that much of the help that happened travelled along the lines of preexisting relationships. When the owner of the third pizza place caught the virus, he had had a friend jump in[26], and the student holding the bagel fort was, though not explicitly corona-related, working as a replacement for a friend also. There, I suspect that the owner had perhaps taken different employment to keep his place afloat.

Besides friends and family, there was also one place where the business managed to protect its employees. At the pub, some workers were "permitterad"[27], which is the Swedish term for their variety of a practice designed to have employers maintain employment. In it, employees work less, employers pay accordingly less, and the state pays most of the difference. This did seem to result in them being very busy quite often, making a follow-up interview impossible, presumably because, while this practice helped with expenses, restaurant work does not decrease proportionally with decreasing customer numbers. It stands out particularly insofar that, while elsewhere, people pulled together to keep businesses afloat, here, they seemed to also manage to protect each other also.

In closing out our look at solidarity and its emotional roots, we are left with a very mixed success on the part of Anthony Oliver-Smith's disaster solidarity work. In the coop, there was a clear structure of solidarity, but equally distributed scraps are still just scraps. Still, between there, the pub and Joe's place, communal approaches were providing stability, with the coop having doubtlessly survived far past the lifespan of a more conventional business, though the burden on those working there is substantial, and in the case of those who leave, too much. Still, they are the best example of solidarity born from equality and mutuality.

This leads into my next point: Where there were no such relations of support before the pandemic, it did not create them by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, much solidarity flowed along pre-existing social ties. These also showed themselves with the stories business owners were commiserating and reassuring one another via the topic of city

[26] He said that this was a friend from his education, which I took to mean that they had met at some form of culinary school, though that is entirely my inference.
[27] I have discussed this situation before with regard to how it required them to have more stable employment relationships, but offered them access to government aid.

restaurants. However, with otherwise little insight into where and whether most of my interlocutors commiserated with one another, there is little more to be said here.

With solidarity among existing relations considered, we turn to the topic of class. Opposite to what the analogy to Turner that Oliver-Smith suggested, class boundaries did not budge[28]. Rents stayed, the government did little, and on the whole, the food service businesses stood alone, with only their own to help them.

That leaves us with a serious question: Where was the communitas? What separates this disaster from the disasters Oliver-Smith was drawing on in explaining the emergence of solidarity?

To start with the obvious, there is duration. The pandemic was nowhere near as sudden as an earthquake, and for many, when its severity became clearer, it had already been around for some time. Then, it stuck around and, at time of writing, it still is. Previously, when discussing the anthropological disaster literature specifically, we already noted that its examples were often near instantaneous, and while they had noted that duration was an element of disaster, the existing examples did not help with exploring the matter. Speculating heavily, I think that the ambiguous and slow start of the pandemic left people understanding its severity at very different times and led to it seeping deeper into normal life, with people trying to find their feet and continuing life as best as possible while the disaster continues to take its toll of exhaustion and attrition.

Beyond duration, there is also the stratification of experiences. As noted in discussing what instances of bonding and solidarity I found, they are quite stratified. This also adds to the larger point made in discussing how the pandemic is heavily distributed along lines of social stratification, i.e. of very different severity for different groups. Returning to the analogy of the ritual, this completely upends it; difference cannot be suspended if it being reinforced and built upon more than ever is a key element of the disaster.

Recalling the ways in which the disaster was felt, we can find yet more differences. Where the disasters Oliver-Smith described were characterized by life-threateningly urgent problems that required immediate action, the pandemic is marked by uncertainty of the future far more than momentary breaches of normality. Instead of demanding action, the pandemic stalls and confuses it.

[28] The coop was considering looking into fundraising for donations, but nothing transpired in my time working with them.

Moreover, the sociality which underlies collective action in Oliver-Smith's examples is undermined by the fact that sociality itself gained an element of threat in the pandemic, and gathering became justifiably stigmatized. Thus, connecting and coordinating became far more difficult, and far lonelier, with the most natural interaction where emotional exchange and bonding might take place becoming compromised.

All in all, the pandemic was well suited to disrupt communal response, and though people still did come together to weather it, doing so along existing lines of connection meant coming together only with others who were just as affected, and had little to give themselves, and yet, they gave what they could.

Coping through Creativity

We've already seen glimpses of the creative ways in which people adapted to the pandemic throughout the text. In terms of theory, Koloma Beck and Maček both center practices which use creativity endure uncontrollable situations. Koloma Beck sees it in the solutions to the new everyday problems people are faced with (2020, p.466), and Maček speaks among similar lines, describing how "war conditions forced literally everybody […] into this amazing mental and emotional 'display' of [creative] power – power coming from a force that will for life created" (2007, p.43).

For normal everyday life to continue providing stability, breaks in routine and breaches of chaos need addressing, and for people with scarce resources, that means finding creative ways to do a lot with very little.

Practical Creativity

We begin lightly, and on familiar terrain, and look at barriers. Many of these pieces will be familiar from my initial discussion of aesthetics, but the view I aim to provide now is inverted: Where the aesthetic discussion focused on these places as seen from outside, we now aim for more of an inside view. Particularly, we will look at barriers, and how they are, at once, an utterly common feature of restaurant layouts, but also intentionally placed (with or without pandemic), and how they served as inspiration and blueprint for many measures my interlocutors came up with.

One of those barriers that definitely pre-dated the pandemic was a large person-high façade at the third pizza place. It had plexiglass panels installed at the top, giving it that bit of extra height. On the other side, there was a kitchen area, with a counter attached to the façade, and it went across the whole room, stopping just short of the wall, lowering first to only the

counter, making a space for the cash register, and then stopping entirely with enough space left to comfortably walk past. Above the cash register there hung another plexiglass sheet from the ceiling. When I asked the owner about it, he couldn't remember when he had installed it. I was sure it was an artifact of the pandemic – never before it had I seen such a thing in my life, but I too had a hard time paying attention to these hanging shields when they complemented the natural layout of barriers common in restaurants.

At the vegan coop, the layout of the barriers had more recently been thought through. The counter employee had a little corner of the front area where customers entered, cordoned off by the counter itself and a little display fridge, from which they would sell cake. To complement the cake, there was a large espresso machine on the counter. Employees would step through between the two, and there was a taped line on the floor marking the boundary. Kathleen mentioned that they had actually rotated the display fridge in a renovation effort early during COVID to face the room, rather than the front, because customers had been leaning in to point at what they wanted, with one even stepping over the boundary into the employee area. However, Kathleen was hesitant to attribute the change specifically to the need to adapt to COVID, as opposed to general improvements.

At the sushi place, there was no such ambiguity. Everything had been adapted into an overarching safety concept, yet they were also using barriers, expanding heavily on the in-built features. The single most striking feature was a line of tables about two meters (the generally held safe distance) in front of the table, cutting off the path of anyone entering, and keeping them at a distance. On it, there were all things necessary, from menus, business cards, to a place at the far end where orders could be placed by the owners and picked up by customers.

This, however, was not all they did. In addition to using existing barriers and building on them, abstractly or otherwise, they, and others, also developed a keen eye for the flow and movements of customers. At the sushi place, this manifested as them giving customers times when they could pick up their food, meaning they would not queue, leaving the place often empty (since they had stopped indoor dining, also). Thinking along similar lines, the coop had placed tape X's on the ground to indicate proper queuing distance and moved tables around to have larger groups in the back, rather than near the queue, and the corner café was using the same tape X's to mark off tables and introduce more distanced seating. As perhaps also indicated by the moving of the display fridge being not a pandemic-specific change, it seemed

like this eye for how people moved was not necessarily new to the pandemic, however it had clearly gained a new kind of weight in becoming an element of safety and disease prevention.

Other practices were similar: Washing hands, in particular, had gained a new kind of gravity as Kathleen and Joe told me. Other familiar hygiene procedures, like cleaning tables, experienced a similar change, and were also slightly adapted, like by creating a proper cleaning solution for tables.

In all this, the running theme is how people approach the need for creative problem-solving. Using barriers, and other tools they know, they adjust themselves to the new situation, finding old ways to handle new problems. Sometimes, this appears to come very naturally, particularly in the instance of the hanging plexiglass sheets, which, I suspect, were not just an extension of the common barriers which separate restaurants, but also picked up from their quick establishment in supermarkets. However, at other times, familiar tools were applied with clear intention. Somewhere in the process, the tools changed, though: Instead of physically obstructing, some of the new implementations of barriers were abstracted, like forbidden tables. Similarly, the eye for people's movement which some of my interlocutors already had prior to the pandemic also needed to be abstracted and evolved to capture the new challenges of the pandemic, and so it was.

Thus, creativity here did not mean coming up with outlandish and novel ideas, it meant expanding existing knowledge and practice with abstract yet pragmatic thinking to also apply to and incorporate new problems, making them familiar and addressable. Indeed, with things like the hanging shields, this process was so successful that it became hard to investigate. Only disruptive adaptations seem to stick out, while ones that draw on the familiar become hard to actually track, being just natural extensions of known things.

Sense-making Creativity

The theme of people drawing on the world around them for ideas extends beyond objects like barriers. People, too, were being involved, particularly when my interlocutors were trying to make sense of the situation. With a few of them, once the conversation had moved outside of the more formal style of interview, I was faced with one specific question, that of my nationality. My language abilities and lack thereof left no doubt that I was a foreigner, but the question proved to be more specifically motivated. While people would relate to my nationality with brief comments sometimes, often about relatives abroad of their own, and sooner or later they would treat me as a bit of an interlocutor of their own, and quiz

me on the COVID policy and situation in Germany, on immigration rules and whatever else came to mind.

Jack, from the vegan coop, was particularly fond of comparative questions, and it seemed like I wasn't the only one he was asking: He had friends or family in Britain as well as Romania and as such, he always had somewhere to draw on for comparisons, like when he compared the then new alcohol curfew in Sweden to British pub closing rules. As an internationally quite mobile person, this seemed to come naturally to him in conversation, and more generally to be a way he related to and got to know others.

Personal connection seemed to be the common denominator in how judgments were formed. When he talked about hygiene measures, like wearing masks, Jack would immediately relate to his personal observations in other stores, or with what he'd seen travelling over Christmas. Similarly, Kathleen compared the safety measures they'd taken to a competing restaurant which, she exasperatedly told me, had kept a buffet open until a month into the pandemic. From international comparison to eyeing the neighbors, comparative gossip (I say this without any intent to disparage) was extensively used to assess the situation, and people would nearly always think in terms of personally relating, and would be creative in who they involved, and how they related.

However, the most comprehensive theory of what was going on probably was the pub owner's. His theory seemed far more personal than most others' communal constructions (though he likely included his experience working with people) and centered on the role of fear. He had predicted that, with the reassurance of open veranda doors and air circulation going away, and with sickness generally being on the rise in winter, people would be more afraid to come in. This was a major theme in how he discussed the situation – he seemed to see most things in terms of whether they would make people more or less afraid, which had (as mentioned before) also led to him taking the grim rhetoric of the government rather seriously. His reaction, conversely, had been quite mundane: Besides safety procedures, his key measure had been to lower prices to drum up business more, to encourage customers to eat anyway, or to get takeaway. I cannot speak to the financial outcome of the measures, but he certainly seemed to feel more in control of the situation than most.

The theories people constructed did not necessarily always lead to action, but sometimes they did. The coop was a melting pot of international perspectives (even moreso than my other field sites), including Kathleen's and Jack's, which helped their ability to navigate the situation. For instance, Kathleen drew on the comparison to the US to come up

with a travel quarantine that excluded workers from working there for two weeks after travelling. Likewise, the communication-savvy co-owner of the sushi place still had family in Hong Kong and was also following the news there[29]. She had also gotten creative with the use of her local network: She interpreted tourism, where a friend of hers worked, as a bellwether of how things were going.

This cultural connectedness also had served her in developing their tight security concept. She pointed out that masks, for instance, were far more culturally normal in Asian countries, and she criticized the Swedish government for not offering concrete advice for those who could not stay home[30] (as opposed to her other frame of reference). All these factors had been contributing to her expansive and comprehensive security concept, all despite the fact that she considered the future to be fundamentally impenetrable.

Summarizing Creativity

In looking at the various small things people do to get a handle on their situation, creativity has shown itself to be a key concept for understanding the things people do to cope with the pandemic. Though not under the same kind of duress as civilians in a warzone, we can see how my interlocutors adapted quite diverse ideas into potential solutions for their problems. Together, these point to something not as prominently discussed in the theory I draw on: Diverse and surprising sources of ideas and inspiration. Two aspects warrant particular emphasis to me here. First, there is the importance of places and people's relationships with them. Second, the way in which people sought to understand even the most distant happenings through relations expressed a communal side to this process which is hard to overstate. In their creativity, people were physical persons in physical places, utterly social and revealed themselves as profoundly connected and integrated, leaving no part of themselves out of the process.

However, while instructive, the concept of normality does not give us the most granular view. Certainly, people came together, exchanged ideas and gossip, and in doing so they were negotiating ideas of normality among each other, and for themselves, but in this situation, with the stakes and risks not quite as severe as in war, this process also had significant elements of sociality, exploration, and playfulness, and people looked for very

[29] Another example of this was the student who was holding the fort at the bagel place, but his connection to Sweden was far more tenuous: He spoke little Swedish and was following foreign language news and guidances instead.
[30] A criticism which I have, pursued and integrated in my analysis too.

varied things from it, likely because they came to it with very different problems, certainly in part determined by their varied roles and social positions.

From some rejecting the premise that sense can truly be made of it all to others developing personal, actionable and enacted theories of events, people held their understandings in very different regard. Yet, despite potential skepticism, these processes turned particularly elaborate with administrators and seemed to present a functional epistemological grounding for people's sense of reality, and for some, even provide a basis for serious action. This, I believe, is where the motivating problem becomes very apparent. With administrators being most burdened by the uncertainty of the future curtailing their sense of agency, their confidence in their understandings of the situation became less important than those understandings either providing a sense of control in being worked out, or genuine paths to action.

For frontline workers, however, I want to reiterate that long term uncertainty was a problem they entrusted to others, and short term breaches and emotional labor were their main burden. This might be why they meet larger social processes with a deeper skepticism, rendering them the subject of much suspicion, speculation, and investigation. In this, the role of creativity becomes far less strictly tied to the re-establishment of disturbed normality[31].

To conclude, the role of creativity in helping people cope with and endure the pandemic is, though complex, very evident, and much the same goes for solidarity. However, I do not present them to give readers of this thesis a sense of catharsis at the end of a bleak story. This disaster is not being disproportionately born by service workers by chance. Their burden was imposed, and they had nowhere to turn but toward each other. Perhaps necessity sparks innovation, but if even a fraction of the energy behind such astounding displays of effort, endurance, and creativity as I have described could have been devoted anywhere else, everyone would have been better for it – including those benefitting from the uneven arrangement.

[31] One could easily argue that (re-)establishing a sense of normality on that scale is a far more complex task, and is simply not concluded, but investigating that is outside of the scope of my work here.

Chapter 5

Looking to the future, tying together the theories, and concluding

Where do we go now?

There was a topic in my fieldwork which, when I encountered it, always stuck out to me. Not because what was said – the details did not stick with me, even if I actually managed to understand them in any depth. Rather, it was the type of response it evoked. Elaborate, lengthy explanations, put forward more readily than perhaps anything else, would greet me as soon as I touched on the seemingly innocuous topic of cleaning procedures. We've touched on the relationship of body and memory before, and how it shaped Joe's relationship to the pizzeria that was, nominally, his father's. Here, we encounter the topic again and it seems instructive for the relationship we will have with the memory of the pandemic once it has passed[32]. For my interlocutors, the repeated, lengthy, and very physical act of cleaning seemed to be leaving a memory more visceral and accessible than virtually any other facet.

Turning to the literature, the closest precedent for something like this seems to be how war ingrains a new normality into bodily memory (Koloma Beck, 2015). For the general population, there will likely be no corollary quite so intense as the protracted cleaning procedures, but the sensation of wearing masks, the physical avoidance of being near others, and touch, as well as simply spending far more time at home, inside and alone, will likely stick with our bodies too (Koloma Beck, 2020, p.458). But, similar to the way that frank and casual discussion of people's experience with the disease have become common, we will likely also see social processing of those experiences, and we will need it.

Moving away from the personal scale, and toward the institutional, we once more are reminded of the void of precedent. The outcomes the disaster literature reports already vary wildly from entrenchment of power to reactive justice movements (Solway, 1994; Oliver-Smith, 2020a), that is to say that there are a lot of possible predictions and likely, many of them will hold up for different facets of the aftermath. However, I would argue that accounting for the length of COVID in thinking about what is to come paints a bleak picture: Since previous disasters did not have a 'during'-phase, what they revealed was a snapshot. Here, however, the disaster reveals systems of distributions, and then goes on. So, unless we rigidly believe that this is only obvious to the affected, it is clear that these relations continue, despite having become more visible, and despite the increased, visible suffering they cause. I posit that this is analogical to the continued violence of war, which needs systematic production of actors capable of continuing to do harm, actors who do not go away once the event has passed (Koloma Beck, 2015, p.155). If this is remotely accurate, it means that

[32] This is hoping that global vaccination efforts will put a genuine end to it.

COVID's duration has not just revealed social stratification and caused suffering, it has entrenched the values that produced these outcomes.

Literature Outlook

Kenneth Hewitt's preamble to *Intepretations of Calamity* (2020a) was radical at the time of its release in its criticism of the existing paradigm in the study of disasters. Its adaption into the mainstream is quite impressive considering its political implications, and these implications were only somewhat dulled in the process. However, this considerable success was not followed by a complete exploration of its implications. While it was successfully applied to geophysical phenomena, the question of what disasters it could help to understand seems to have been neglected somewhat. Two issues require further exploration going forward.

First, a more comprehensive departure from geophysical phenomena. This, I would argue, should even move past the mere examination of the fallout of environmental hazards. I've previously made this case based on the emergence of the anthropocene blurring the boundaries between nature and society, but here I want to argue more generally: Vulnerability theory is not by its terms tied to discussing the impacts of environmental hazards, and its fundamental terms can be illuminating when applied to other issues as well. This is happening in medical anthropology, and the theoretical overlap in this paper might indicate that it may even help to understand war.

Second, particularly given recent developments, and the analogies to war I have used in this paper, prolonged disasters are currently undertheorized in the disaster literature. The growing literature on COVID needs to further examine this and fully explore the implications. Other examples may also prove insightful, and findings may find increased relevance as climate change worsens.

In highlighting the multitude of potential applications for vulnerability theory, however, I must also stress that, while it provides a strong perspective of the broad strokes, connecting it to the personal and lived experiences of people involves bridging a large distance, either by using detailed ethnographic work, or by using it in combination with other theoretical approaches. The value of both is evident in the theory drawing on it, and hopefully also my own work here. Though also somewhat limiting, I believe that it is the key to the flexibility of the theory.

With the perspectives of vulnerability theory surveyed, I would also leave a shorter word on the other theories I have employed. I will highlight my developments in them, and the interesting frictions between them that have come up throughout.

The theory of the state we got from James C. Scott has proven itself versatile here due to its straightforward ideas and sweeping terms. Its specificity in purpose and intent makes it clear and versatile, but it also leaves it with blind spots regarding smaller events and more specific relations of power. If they are accounted for, it is a strong critical perspective on the state's limits and its power to harm.

Emotional labor theory was quite at home in the context of service work, and helped conceptualize its difficulties, as well as highlight common problems of emotional labor. Its ongoing use in conjunction with theories of power and status speaks is fruitful generally, and has been fruitful here.

Post-disaster solidarity has proven an interesting lens as well, highlighting peculiarities of the pandemic by contrast. However, my findings here suggest that it overemphasizes the spontaneity of such solidarity, and that closer attention to social structure and norms which precede and facilitate extraordinary acts of solidarity would improve its ability to understand and predict the emergence of the phenomenon.

Normality and everyday life have offered us disparate but congruent ways to understand the pandemic as analogous to war. Koloma Beck's theory of everyday life was already adapted to the pandemic, and as such was well suited and helpful. Maček's inductive theories from her war ethnography proved eerily well-suited also, underlining the importance of looking at the processes of negotiated normality and everyday life in prolonged disasters. This also helped integrate the occurrence of emotional labor and relations of solidarity into a more cohesive picture. With both approaches, I have left aspects unexplored. With normality, I have not examined the political aspect of the negotiation of normality, and with everyday life, I have not probed the underlying assumption that crises bring societal change in their wake. Both these aspects warrant further exploration.

Conclusion

This thesis is about a disaster where the uneven protection of the population coerced those made most vulnerable by lacking protection into easing the experience of those who were valued enough to be well protected. I examined the experience of those whose livelihoods and well-being were put at stake for this arrangement, and of how they endured.

Core to their coercion is the economic pressure placed on them. It comes from three sources: First, the preexisting distributional arrangements of society, which leave them economically vulnerable. Second, governmental recommendations drastically affecting business. Third, government aid being insufficient to safeguard them.

The other pressure they feel is the threat of the virus. Without reliable, substantial government aid, and with preexisting economic arrangements persisting, they are forced to stay open and face risk of infection. This risk is further compounded by the need to make customers feel welcome and present a sense of normality, which obscures the looming chaos of the pandemic, and in turn limits the available safety measures. Some avoid this through creative realignment to customers seeking safety, but they receive no guidance from the government.

The ensuing downward redistribution of the risk and emotional labor of the pandemic is accompanied by an upward redistribution of resources, both of which happen along occupational lines which also express divisions in class and ethnicity, meaning that restaurant workers tend to be poorer (including students) and not ethnic Swedes. It seems evident, but not provable, that these boundaries reflect the values and organization of a society which placed them in a vulnerable position in the first place, and which keeps them there and working. More selection toward economically disadvantaged groups in this vulnerable population happens, because while more privileged individuals can quit, those experiencing the most economic precarity cannot.

This creates a number of burdens on frontline workers. Emotionally, they must process the knowledge of their coerced vulnerability, and they need to do this while reassuring themselves, their coworkers, and the customers who are their economic lifeline, but also are carriers of the risk. Economically, many are facing slumps in income caused by restaurants offloading some of their financial strain by cutting wages, sometimes with consensus, other times without. Moreover, their jobs are far less secure, as the businesses they work in face varying financial difficulties, creating the risk of bankruptcy, further wage cuts, or, potentially, layoffs.

Due to the small size of the businesses, many bosses are also frontline workers. However, they also bear the burden of administrative work. Administrative work forces those doing it to be very aware of the uncertainties in the businesses' future, and makes them continuously face their relative powerlessness. On top of this, they also want to broadcast a sense of confidence to themselves, customers, and coworkers. This is further emotional labor, but also offers a sense of self-assurance and agency.

This is part of a greater tendency to meet these challenges with solidarity, particularly in businesses with more mutual and communitarian values, which increase workers' attachment and investment. However, the reach of solidarity is limited by the pandemic to stay inside businesses and existing social ties.

Solidarity takes two forms: Material, and emotional. Material solidarity involves the voluntary sharing of the financial and labor burden and is particularly effective when it manages to draw on state resources. Emotional solidarity mostly comes in the form of mutual reassurance, and is more common with hierarchically equal workers. This leads to some owners commiserating with each other, rather than within the business. The efficacy of emotional work to conceal negative emotions to protect others is less clear, both for owners and workers.

Creativity comes in roughly two types also: practical creativity, and sense-making creativity. In practical creativity, people use their understandings of and relationships with the spaces in which they work to solve novel problems, expanding and abstracting existing ideas to help.

Sense-making creativity is more the domain of those having to deal with uncertainty and looming chaos, meaning it is slightly more the domain of administrators. With frontline workers, it is part of a more fluid continuum with emotional solidarity, where they creatively use their varied networks to creatively negotiate about ideas of what is going on as part as a playful communal process. With administrators, this process has higher stakes and is less playful. Their establishing understandings helps counter feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty by producing a creative sense of agency, and potentially goes on to offer actionable solutions which express and enact more agency still.

In meeting the burden of the pandemic, workers are holistically, personally and socially engaged and draw on diverse and surprising sources of inspiration, acting as much more than just extensions of a business, and in doing so reveal much about themselves and their relationships, both social, as well as to spaces, things, and ideas. This work, however,

only helps them bear the burden of the pandemic and cannot address the factors which place it so disproportionately on their shoulders.

Disaster, as I have shown, does very little to solve itself. Especially with prolonged disasters, the opposite appears to be true, with the distribution structures which create unequal patterns of vulnerability only continuing during the disasters and entrenching themselves further. Facing a world of increasing hazards and catastrophes, the only answer can be to aggressively shield the vulnerable in preparation against the next hazard before it is too late.

Bibliography

Aull Davies, C., 2002. *Reflexive ethnography [Elektronisk resurs] a guide to researching selves and others*. London ; Routledge.

Barrios, R.E., 2017. What Does Catastrophe Reveal for Whom? The Anthropology of Crises and Disasters at the Onset of the Anthropocene. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46(1), pp.151–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102116-041635.

Bolin, B. and Kurtz, L.C., 2018. Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Disaster Vulnerability. In: H. Rodríguez, W. Donner and J.E. Trainor, eds. *Handbook of Disaster Research*, Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research. [online] Cham: Springer International Publishing.pp.181–203. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63254-4_10.

Bourdieu, P., 2007. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. [online] *On Violence*, Durham: Duke University Press.pp.189–198. Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9780822390169-024/html> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2021].

Buch, E. and Robbins, J., 2020. Age, Isolation and Inequality in the Time of COVID-19. *Anthropology Now*, 12(3), pp.24–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2020.1884485.

Connerton, P., 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Faas, A.J. and Barrios, R.E., 2015. Applied Anthropology of Risk, Hazards, and Disasters. *Human Organization*, 74(4), pp.287–295.

Fairclough, N., 2001. *Language and Power*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Foucault, M., 2008. *The birth of biopolitics : lectures at the Collége de France, 1978-1979*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graeber, D., 2011. *Debt: the first 5000 years*. [online] Brooklyn, New York, USA: Melville House. Available at: <http://www.mhpbooks.com/> [Accessed 7 Sep. 2020].

Hewitt, K. ed., 2020a. *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*. 1st edition ed. London: Routledge.

Hewitt, K., 2020b. The idea of calamity in a technocratic age. In: K. Hewitt, ed. *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, 1st edition. London: Routledge.pp.3–32.

Hochschild, A.R., 2012. *The managed heart [Elektronisk resurs] commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Jones, E.C. and Murphy, A.D., 2009. *The Political Economy of Hazards and Disasters*. Plymouth: Rowman Altamira.

Jones, E.C. and Murphy, A.D., 2015. Social Organization of Suffering and Justice-Seeking in a Tragic Day Care Fire Disaster. In: R.E. Anderson, ed. *World Suffering and Quality of Life*, Social Indicators Research Series. [online] Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.pp.281–291. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9670-5_21.

Koloma Beck, T., 2015. Krieg und Gewohnheit. Phänomenologische und pragmatische Perspektiven auf verkörpertes Gedächtnis in Bürgerkriegen. In: M. Heinlein, O. Dimbath, L. Schindler and P. Wehling, eds. *Der Körper als soziales Gedächtnis*. Springer-Verlag.pp.153–170.

Koloma Beck, T., 2020. Alltag im Reallabor. Pandemie und Bürgerkrieg als existentielle gesellschaftliche Krisen. *Leviathan*, 48(3), pp.451–469. https://doi.org/10.5771/0340-0425-2020-3-451.

Kroll-Smith, S. and Brown-Jeffy, S., 2013. A Tale of Two American Cities: Disaster, Class and Citizenship in San Francisco 1906 and New Orleans 2005. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 26(4), pp.527–551. https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12021.

Lewis, S.L. and Maslin, M.A., 2015. Defining the Anthropocene. *Nature*, 519(7542), pp.171–180. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14258.

Maček, I., 2007. 'Imitation of Life': Negotiating Normality in Sarajevo under Siege. In: X. Bougarel, E. Helms and G. Duijzings, eds. *New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-war Society [Elektronisk resurs]*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Group.pp.39–58.

Marcus, G.E., 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24(1), pp.95–117. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.000523.

Mullard, J.C.R., 2021. Race, Racism and Anthropology: Decolonising Health Inequality in a Time of Covid-19. *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 8(1), pp.1–19. https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.8.1.5112.

Napier, A.D., 2020. Rethinking vulnerability through Covid-19. *Anthropology Today*, 36(3), pp.1–2. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12571.

Nordin, M. and Rooth, D.-O., 2009. The Ethnic Employment and Income Gap in Sweden: Is Skill or Labor Market Discrimination the Explanation? *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 111(3), pp.487–510.

Nordstrom, C. and Martin, J., 1992. The Backyard Front. In: *The paths to domination, resistance, and terror*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.pp.260–274.

Oakley, A., 2013. Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In: H. Roberts, ed. *Doing Feminist Research*. Routledge.pp.30–61.

Oliver-Smith, A., 1996. Anthropological research on hazards and disasters. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25(1), pp.303–328. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.25.1.303.

Oliver-Smith, A., 2020a. The Brotherhood of Pain: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives on Post-Disaster Solidarity. In: A. Oliver-Smith and S.M. Hoffman, eds. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.pp.227–243.

Oliver-Smith, A., 2020b. 'What is a Disaster?': Anthropological Perspectives on a Persistent Question. In: A. Oliver-Smith and S.M. Hoffman, eds. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Oliver-Smith, A. and Hoffman, S.M. eds., 2020. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. 2nd edition ed. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Pillay, I., 2021. Culture, politics and being more equal than others in COVID-19: some psychological anthropology perspectives. *South African Journal of Psychology*, p.00812463211012646. https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463211012646.

Sahlins, M., 2017. *Stone age economics [Elektronisk resurs]*. London: Routledge.

Scott, J.C., 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. [online] New Haven: Yale University Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq3vk> [Accessed 2 Nov. 2020].

Solway, J.S., 1994. Drought as a Revelatory Crisis: An Exploration of Shifting Entitlements and Hierarchies in the Kalahari, Botswana. *Development and Change*, 25(3), pp.471–495. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1994.tb00523.x.

Stanford, L. and Bolin, R., 2020. Examining vulnerability to natural disasters: A comparative analysis of four southern california communities after the northridge earthquake. In: A. Oliver-Smith, S.M. Hoffman and S. Hoffman, eds. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.pp.98–120.

Steinberg, R.J. and Figart, D.M., 1999. Emotional Labor Since The Managed Heart. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 561, pp.8–26.

Taussig, M.T., 1992. *The nervous system*. New York: Routledge.

Team, V. and Manderson, L., 2020. How COVID-19 Reveals Structures of Vulnerability. *Medical Anthropology*, 39(8), pp.671–674. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2020.1830281.

The independent panel for pandemic preparedness and response, 2021. *COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic*. [online] World Health Organization.p.86. Available at: <https://theindependentpanel.org/mainreport/>.

Thucydides, n.d. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Wikisource.

Turner, V.W., 2007. *The ritual process : structure and anti-structure*. New Burnswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

Wisner, B. and Luce, H.R., 1993. Disaster vulnerability: Scale, power and daily life. *GeoJournal*, 30(2), pp.127–140. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00808129.