

## **Covid-19 and a Reality in Flux\***

This issue of *Cairo Studies in English (CSE)*, entitled “Covid-19 and a Reality in Flux,” explores changes in the areas of the humanities and social sciences. Most academic research since the onset of the pandemic has focused on science, technology and economics, setting aside pressing scholarly issues concerning the impact of the pandemic on the lived experience of human beings everywhere, as well as the cultural and artistic repercussions of these exceptional times. The ten articles in this issue challenge the sense of futility and uncertainty which has started with the pandemic and is still felt everywhere. Through literary and linguistic analyses, the articles explore the fight for survival, and investigate the coping mechanisms with states of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Though our reality is still in flux, it is important to start learning how to navigate our way in a changing world, and take note of the lessons learnt from this moment of crisis.

Although research on the effects of the pandemic on the humanities is still flimsy and literature written during quarantine has not yet been scrutinised, great literature about previous plagues needs to be revisited through the unique lens of living during COVID-19. Such literature, whether concerned with the fictional or the real, is a treasure to explore. Artistic expressions about pandemics prove that the human imagination is capable of reconfiguring reality. They are also capable of getting us to think about the human condition in the midst of a global crisis, and about the possible paths towards healing.

Yasmine Ahmed Sweed in “Because Survival is Insufficient’: Pandemic Narratives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” examines the paradigm shifting effect on people’s ideas, beliefs, and social structures, in *Such Is This World@sars.come* by the Chinese writer Hu Fayunm, and in *Station Eleven* by the Canadian American author Emily St. John Mandel. Exploring the therapeutic effect of literature Heba Sharobeem in “The World’s Tsunami Covid-19 and the Relief Aid of Literature” examines four texts of different genres; two of which chronicle the occurrence of Cholera, in Egypt, while the other two deal with the outbreak of a fictional pandemic. The comparison of reality and fiction continues in “Unsettling

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Epiphanies: Rereading José Saramago's *Blindness* in the time of Covid-19" by Jaidaa Gawad Hamada, where she combines reflections on the reality of the situation with that on fictional infectious diseases to realize epiphanic insights.

In "Civil and Uncivil Classes in the Light of the Pandemic: Postcolonial Perspectives on the Question of Who Cares," Caroline Rooney veers away from pandemic literature and argues that the pandemic serves to reveal class structures and social alignments that is long-entrenched, yet insufficiently registered. Her analysis of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* shows how they offer frameworks of ethics of social care for us to understand what the pandemic requires us to re-consider.

In "Fear Generation and Policy Legitimization Through Proximization of Threat in COVID-19 Discourse," Safaa Mustafa Alshawanani discusses proximation strategies that have been widely employed to communicate facts and legitimize public discourses about the pandemic. Dalia Hamed deals with the same theory in relation to children's e-books in her article "Proximization Theory and Threat Construction in Selected E-Storybooks for Children on COVID-19."

In "Representation of Social Actors in Medical Humanities: A Multimodal Study of Selected English and Arabic Infographics on COVID-19," Lubna Adel Sherif addresses the establishment of a COVID-19 discourse which rests on hope rather than fear. Abeer Abd El-Aal Sultan in "Fighting Covid-19 with Fun: Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Coronavirus Webcomics," deals with the the multimodal nature of the internet which gave room to creative expressions allowed us to laugh at the pandemic as a a means of survival. Another paper that focuses on the healing power of laughter is "Pictorial Metaphors and Narrativity in Coronavirus Discourse" by Yomn Muhammad SharafEIDin and Nihal Nagi Sarhan. The study presents a contrastive analysis of Egyptian and American memes to examine how they operate in both cultures. And finally, Mervat Ahmed Mahmoud applies critical discourse analyses to examine Trump's negative othering of China on Twitter during the covid outbreak in "Polarization and Negative-Other 'China' Presentation in US President Trump's COVID-19 Tweets: A Critical Discourse Analysis."

In order to address this unique moment in history, in this issue of *CSE*, we include testimonials where writers and artists examine how their work has been affected by the pandemic, and the way the creative mind deals with adversity. In the seven testimonials plenty is shared; starting with Samia Badih's exploration of her motherhood and her notes on the transformations taking place in the art scene, to Elmaz Abinader and a long-entangled relationship with Lebanon which

climaxed in the Beirut explosion on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2020. May Temissany is surprised by a “sudden explosion of creativity,” and Seni Seneverani speaks of the pain as well as the “tendrils of hope” she keeps capturing. Siham Bent Sanya w Abdelsalam’s attempts to find mobility during the quarantine. Terry Gifford tells of how scientific data turned into poetry, and Ben Rivers realizes the need to collect seed and water life.

The book review in this issue features Lawrence Wright’s *The End of October*, which, according to Iman Jamal, prophesses the Coronavirus.

The editors of this issue would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Walid Elhamamsy, for his earlier participation in this issue, and give him credit for its title. Thanks are also due to all reviewers for the time and insightful remarks they gave to this issue. We are also grateful to all contributors for their valuable contributions, and their patience and understanding. Last but not least special thanks go to Dr. Amira Fawzi, the editorial assistant, without whose dedication, hard work and scrupulous leadership of the editing team, this issue would not have been completed. An extended thank you is due to the team of copyeditors for their careful reading of the papers: Aya El Shafei, Amira Zoheiry, and Samah Awad.

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