

Organizing amidst Covid-19

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The world is on fire, with both fever and flame. After a few months of lockdown, things are erupting in new ways. The movement for Black Lives is demanding an end to anti-Black racism and conversations about abolishing the police are on late night television. In North America, a new world appears to be dawning, one that didn't seem possible even a month ago. Meanwhile, in the new centre of global capitalism, the long-standing Hong Kong movement seems to be on the point of succumbing to a new wave of repression.

Around the world, movements are strategizing about how to ensure that no one is left behind. In April we put out a call for short pieces on this theme. We could see that the imminent arrival of the virus had generated many different struggles - initially pressure to force some states to take action in the first place, resistance to cuts and demanding benefits. Then came struggles characterized by mutual aid, efforts to protect essential workers, and the most vulnerable, such as the homeless, prisoners, the elderly and the undocumented.

We were overwhelmed with contributions that reflected the gradual mobilization of the organized left, feminists and LGBTQ+ activists, the self-organisation of migrants and precarious workers, resistance to curfews and the expansion of the surveillance state, the reorganisation of ecological and food sovereignty movements, artistic and online struggles. These movements achieved significant successes, in many different contexts. In the end we published thirty-eight pieces, from every continent except Antarctica.

And right as we stopped at the end of May, US police killed George Floyd and a new chapter of movements during Covid began. This new wave of protest, with protests in over 2000 cities (as of June 13th) is particularly visible in North America and in parts of Europe and Africa and builds on the experiences of organizing under Covid-19 as well as on longer Black Lives Matter struggles, practices of mutual aid and dialogues between movements. It is one that is expanding the range of the possible, with powerful demands for the defunding of police departments, charges laid against violent officers and promises of new Black hires in a range of institutions, new programs and resources for Black communities.

In Hong Kong, “the other superpower” also experienced a new upsurge in resistance as the Chinese state, too, sought to use the pandemic to wrap the flag around state leadership and assert its power in a very different context. As we go to press, the new security legislation has just come into effect and many activists and organisations are going at least partly below the radar. It is too early to tell whether Goliath will win, or if Hong Kong will prove indigestible together with China's many other struggles – of Tibetans and Uyghurs, migrant workers and peasants, women and LGBTQ+ people.

Movements in both countries escape the facile violence vs non-violence description: both states have the physical capacity to destroy their opponents, but struggle to construct the political capacity to do so. In this context, activists - staying far below the level of violence deployed against them - resist physically as well as in many other ways.

This is also a moment of internationalism. Many have noted that the past dozen years (since the global crash of 2007-8) have seen a rise of nationalism, after a period of globalization. Borders are tightening and xenophobic formations are accelerating. But now, during a period of parallel closures - which have worked very differently in different countries - activists around the world are experiencing something that both unites and divides.

In this spirit, we want to state our solidarity *both* with Black Lives Matter protesters *and* with the Hong Kong movement, and to reject the claim that all that matters is which superpower you support. *Interface* stands, ultimately, for the development of popular power from below – for social movements as substantive democracy – and rejects the cynicism that sees ordinary people’s struggles as pawns on some imaginary chessboard.

In this issue

This issue has 55 pieces, covering movements in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, the UK, the US and globally and written in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

The special section of this issue contains almost all of the short pieces originally written for our rolling coverage of movements in the virus, as well as a few pieces written especially for this special issue. We’ve included dates in these articles because of how quickly the situation has evolved in different countries: these pieces represent reflective activists and engaged researchers trying to grasp what their movements were doing, and what they should do, in an unprecedented situation.

Together they show just how thoughtful, creative, brave and radical our movements actually are - in the teeth of hostile or trivialising media, attempts at commodification and conspiracy theories. If there is hope for the future, it is to be found *here*, and not in state or corporate leaderships who have been found as desperately wanting as have the dominant social groups they represent. A world we can live in will be a world built “from below and on the left”, in many forms.

In a period when many conventional academic journals have reported a falling-off in submissions from women due to increased care responsibilities in the crisis, and when commercially-oriented activist media have often gone to their usual white male commentators, it is striking what a difference it makes to just

do things differently. We did not commission these pieces; and we deliberately *lowered the bar* in seeking short, non-peer review pieces. As a result, the gender, geographical and ethnic distribution is considerably broader - while much remains to be done, particularly on redressing the balance between majority world voices and experiences and those of the global North.

We had called for contributions that reflected on: a) movements already going on prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus; b) collective actions that informed the involvements of activists, who at various capacities responded to the crisis; c) struggles of the civil society that made their states take action; d) specific needs campaign, solidarity economy and mutual aid initiatives that have catered to very specific to general needs of people from particular social backgrounds, and lastly e) longer-term perspectives of what might the crisis mean for movements and what are the possibilities of a better world in post-pandemic times.

These contributions have all grappled with at least one of these themes. We attempted to thematise them further so as to bring out not only the differences but also the similarities in the depth, types and creativity of autonomous initiatives during the ongoing global crisis. This new wave is not a return to normal. What this issue – and today’s movements – illustrate is an expansion of movements that place the most vulnerable at the centre, and demand systemic solutions to systemic problems – perhaps providing possibilities for a better world.

Overviews of movement struggles in specific places

We begin with a series of articles that attempt to grasp the complexity and diversity of movements within a single space: Spain (Martinez), Ireland (Cox), Toronto / Canada (Wood), Kenya (Chukunizira), Udine / Italy (Venturini) and Delhi / India (Mohanty).

Wearing the lens of an activist researcher, Miguel Martinez explores the enhanced meanings of solidarity that emerged during the corona virus crisis. Laurence Cox’s intervention explores current and post-pandemic struggles with a particular focus on how movements contest and force state action as well as exploring movement pressures for systemic transformation.

Lesley Wood shows how extra-legal procedures and actions have created a wall between care givers and civic society actors with the homeless, disabled, incarcerated, migrants, elderly, sexualised and marginalised. Her analysis is intersectional, connecting to social justice. Angela Chukunzira presents an array of movements that emerged to tackle the war on the poor.

Federico Venturini’s personal experiences organizing during the pandemic inform his reflections around time lapse, digital bottlenecks, and the rise of alternative platforms for protests. Lastly, Sobhi Mohanty narrates communal violence and Muslim apartheid in times of Covid-19.

Our blog also included a link to John Krinsky and Hillary Caldwell's [overview of movement networks](#) in New York City during the virus.

Feminist and LGBTQ+ activism

Hongwei Bao writes about the Wuhan-based feminist movement “Anti-domestic violence little vaccine”. Bao sees the pandemic as a window to experiment new/flexible modes of activism. Ayaz Ahmed Siddiqui details the *Aurat march* in Karachi, Pakistan – that ingeniously connects the pandemic with on-going/historic movements against misogyny, domestic/sexual violence, honor killings and homophobia.

Similarly Lynn Ng Yu Ling shows the exponential growth of the *PinkDot* Movement in Singapore and how the pandemic has created a virtual space that paints the city state pink progressing non-discriminatory and non-identitarian aspirations. María José Ventura Alfaro details autonomous Feminist collectives that cater to local food and medicine shortages besides raising awareness to multi-level violence/s in Mexico.

Finally, Ben Trott explores the politics of distance and the ethics of care in the struggle to preserve the movement infrastructure of Queer Berlin.

Reproductive struggles

For over half a decade, *Non Una di Meno Roma*, a trans-feminist and feminist Italian movement has countered violence against classed, sexualized, racialized people while challenging traditional understanding of (re)productivity and body politics. Their fantastic piece, translated into English here for the first time, seeks to grasp the complexity of the current moment in a perspective grounded in materialist and feminist struggles around work both paid and unpaid.

Labour organising

Ben Duke observes how the pandemic provides a platform of collective change in the employment/welfare landscape for the precarious. Another brilliant study on precarity and il/legality around the migrant laborforce in Brazil is forwarded by Louisa Acciari.

Moving on, Arianna Tassinari, Riccardo Emilia Chesta and Lorenzo Cini report on the re-politicisation of precarious work, occupational security and health safety of workers in Italy. Tass Sharkawi and N. Ali's piece discusses how Egyptian health care workers used whistleblowing as a form of contentious mobilisation under authoritarianism.

Mallige Sirimane and Nisha Thapliyal takes us to India giving a close perspective on statist policies that toppled the lives of day laborers during Covid-19 lockdown in Karnataka, India.

Finally, our blog included a link to [Jeremy Brecher's piece](#) about precarious strikes across the United States.

Migrant and refugee struggles

Johanna May Black, Sutapa Chattopadhyay and Riley Chisholm explore migrant-specific mutual-aid alliances across the globe. Anitta Kynsilehto focusses on the specific challenges of migrant solidarity in Morocco, where solidarity groups were already under fire.

Susan Thieme and Eda Elif Tibet discuss how Swiss women and unions organised together before and during lockdown around issues including the situation of migrant women and care workers. Chiara Milan runs an analysis on refugee comradeship along the highly porous Western Balkans frontier zone.

Marco Perolini complements these entries as he writes on the struggles of refugees and others in Germany against housing refugees in camps, subjected to curfew and forced quarantine under the virus.

Amidst a sea of stories about inhumane procedures and interventions against stateless and paperless migrants, it was a joy to read about these progressive strategies of resistance during the most difficult global crisis.

Ecological activism

Clara Thompson discusses how Fridays for Future were already on the back foot before lockdown, while challenging media myths in social media has its limits: what can activists do now? Susan Paulson carries out a twofold analysis of the relationship between degrowth, crisis and finding a politics to move through and beyond the pandemic.

Peterson Derolus' French-language piece explores the Haitian mining resistance during the pandemic. While Silpa Satheesh discusses Earth day protests by masked activists in Kerala, India challenging toxic wastes in the Periyar river.

Lastly, Ashish Kothari discusses indigenous and Dalit "territories of life" and the possibility of radical ecological democracy grounded in popular struggles.

Our blog also included a link to Jeremy Brecher's fascinating piece about how the struggles of workers and communities around the virus hold the germs of an [emergency Green New Deal](#).

Food sovereignty organising

Dagmar Diesner holds a unique example of *CampiAperti* which is a food producing collective providing food sufficiency during the pandemic in Bologna, Italy. Similarly *URGENCEI* is a community supported agriculture collective that

provides a safe and resilient alternative to -chemical-induced/industrial food production.

Jenny Gkougi takes us to small-scale Greek farmers who led a nationwide social media campaign to merge producers and consumers. John Foran writes about a student-based organization *Eco Vista* that makes unique efforts to create sustainable living. All these entries show how such movements – necessarily grounded in the longer-term - connect the pre-crisis world with the virus-dominated situation and possible futures.

Solidarity and mutual aid

Michael Zeller explores the strain on homeless and impoverished people due to protective measures and institutionalisation of social service, during the pandemic, in Karlsruhe, Germany. Some of our contributions fit in more than one theme, like Sergio Ruiz Cayuela's article on solidarity soup kitchen in Birmingham, which could equally fit in the previous section.

Clinton Nichols delves into the prospects of post-secondary education for the incarcerated during the pandemic. Finally, Micha Fiedlschuster and Leon Rosa Reichle use the case of Leipzig, Germany to explore the variety of practical and analytical approaches mutual aid.

Artistic and digital resistance

Kerman Calvo and Ester Bejarano write on the social spaces of protest and extraordinary relevance of music promoting bonds to cope with the nostalgia and crisis of the virus. Neto Holanda and Valesca Lima's Portuguese-language piece discusses the struggles and challenges faced by artists and cultural actors in Brazil during the crisis, particularly in the state of Ceará.

Margherita Massarenti informs us about the practical realities of the online organizing around a #Rentstrike that developed out during the pandemic. A fascinating entry was forwarded by Dounya on virtual forms of everyday resistance and grassroots broadcasting in Iran – in a new wave of global authoritarianism, it is important to see that even in states which have experienced decades of authoritarian rule there is resistance.

Imagining a new world

Donatella della Porta details how crucially new and change in strategies of social movements can create spaces for reflection about a post-pandemic world. Jackie Smith similarly connects systemic capitalism and human rights movements. Yariv Mohar expands the discussion of human right and social justice issues amid Covid-19.

The piece by Julien Landry, Ann Marie Smith, Patience Agwenjang, Patricia Blankson Akakpo, Jagat Basnet, Bhumiraj Chapagain, Aklilu Gebremichael,

Barbara Maigari and Namadi Saka follows on from governance theme to civic society participation. Roger Spear, Gulcin Erdi, Marla A. Parker and Maria Anastasia write how Covid-19 has created a range of responses to alleviate direct and indirect impacts on people, institutions, systems, cultures.

Breno Bringel brilliantly ties this special issue with a note on moving on from cataclysmic capitalism to a pluriverse one through new forms of protests, new articulation of change, and new modes of connection across people and places. We started the issue with similar calls for change (see Cox, Khothari and della Porta)

Non-themed articles

As in every issue of *Interface*, we also present general (non-themed) pieces.

Luke Beesley's article explores the birth of the "social model of disability" in Britain. Using newly-available material, he explores the activist debates within the Disabled People's Movement and shows the centrality of democratic self-organisation in the dynamics that surrounded the emergence of a social definition of disability. Doris Murphy's piece draws on oral history interviews with participants in Ireland's successful campaign for abortion rights. She shows that despite widespread awareness of the need for activist self-care, the pressures of the situation and lack of resources often undercut participants' ability to put this into practice, and calls for a move from individual self-care to collective care.

Poyraz Kolluoglu's ethnography of the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul highlights how – despite scholarly assimilation to the "Arab Spring" or "Occupy" - participants were more likely to frame the events in relation to the 1871 Paris Commune, "conjuring up the spirits of the past to their service" as Marx observed of another uprising. Dimitris Papanikolopoulos' article explores the reorganisation of Greek movements and politics in the 2010s around resistance or opposition to the Troika. He looks at the intense cognitive work done by movement participants in deconstructing traditional political boundaries and constructing new ones: what outside accounts understand as populism turns out to be an active construction from below.

Noah Krigel's article attempts to understand the current shift to the right in global politics through an ethnography of a college Republican club in the US. He identifies the narratives of victimhood, exclusionary mechanisms and gender politics involved among these students, who are increasingly being supported by elites as the future of hard-right politics. Rohan Davis' short piece, on the pro Palestinian movement in Australia, notes the marginalisation of Palestine solidarity in Australian politics, notes the impact of the Bernie Sanders candidature on the expansion of pro-Palestine views in the US and calls for charismatic leadership of this kind in Australia. Michael Zeller's article argues for a more systematic approach to theorising the demobilisation of social movements, presenting a complex logic of causal factors. It uses the case of

Russia's 2011-12 For Fair Elections movement to show how this analysis works in practice.

Two articles look at the relationship between movement activists and researchers around nonviolence. Charla Burnett and Karen Ross' article carries out a meta-analysis of movement training manuals and scholarly research, contrasting how they discuss scaling up. The authors note how research on campaigns diverges substantially from what activists prioritise when trying to increase the size and impact of non-violent action. Kyle Matthews' article on how movements use research discusses Extinction Rebellion's use of Chenoweth and Stephan's research to argue that if 3.5% of a population engages in civil disobedience success is inevitable. He shows that this is based on misunderstanding the context of the research. Both papers argue for better dialogue between researchers and movements – a key concern for *Interface*.

We are delighted to finish with a paper that does just that. A team of academic researchers and Indigenous youth - Levi Gahman, Filiberto Penados, Adaeze Greenidge, Seferina Miss, Roberto Kus, Donna Makin, Florenio Xuc, Rosita Kan and Elodio Rash – co-authored this article about dignity-anchored, dream-driven and desire-based research coming out of Maya youth organising that is redefining development in southern Belize, from the perspective of an Indigenous movement which has won historic gains on land rights.

Book reviews

Finally, we have a bumper crop of book reviews. Isaac K. Oommen reviews Yasser Munif's *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death*. Masao Sugiura's *Against the Storm: How Japanese Print workers Resisted the Military Regime, 1935-1945* is reviewed by Alexander James Brown.

Rogelio Regalado Mujica offers a Spanish-language review of Samir Gandesha (ed.), *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives*. Daniel Ozarow's *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-Class Revolt: Comparative Insights from Argentina* is reviewed by Agnes Gagyí.

Cameron Shingleton reviews Andy Blunden's *Hegel for Social Movements*. Cas Mudde's *The Far Right Today* is reviewed by Patrick Sawyer. Lastly, Dawn Marie Paley reviews Alyshia Gálvez' *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies and the Destruction of Mexico*.

Writing for *Interface*

A call for papers for future issues of *Interface* follows. *Interface* seeks to share learning between different social movement struggles and movements in different places and to develop dialogue between activist and academic understandings and between different political and intellectual traditions. That

means we publish pieces by activist thinkers as well as academic researchers (and many people who are both), and in many different formats.

Because of this, *Interface* doesn't have a "line" - or rather, the line is that we want to hear from movement participants who are thinking about strategy, tactics, movement theory, history etc. and from researchers on movements who are committed to working with activists rather than for purely academic goals. It is movements "from below" - movements of the poor, the powerless and those at the bottom of cultural hierarchies - who most need this reflection. Conversely we are opposed to racism, fascism, casteism, and religious fundamentalism. This dialogue and audience should also shape writing for *Interface*.

Please, please don't write us pieces aimed at convincing a general public to support your cause! Most of our readers are already very heavily engaged in their own movements: if you have a good piece for a general public, why not publish it somewhere that public will actually see it? Similarly, please don't send us pieces which are all about the theoretical analysis of social structures, economics, culture, biopolitics or whatever. Again, *Interface* readers get it: but what they are interested in is what people actually do to resist and / or change these structures, what happens when they resist and how they can struggle better. Lastly, some academic and political styles of writing are all about showing that you're part of the in-group: using a vocabulary that people in other movements /traditions/disciplines can't make sense of is fine if you're writing for that kind of journal, but it isn't *Interface*.

What do we want? Clearly-written pieces that don't assume your readers know your country / movement / academic discipline / theoretical tradition but focus on what readers can learn from the movement you're writing about, including from its mistakes, dilemmas, challenges and conflicts. Something you would find interesting and useful if you were reading it about a different movement, in a different country! Have a look at our past issues to get a better sense of who our readers and writers are – and try writing for them. Our guidelines for contributors and "About *Interface*" pages have more details.

***Interface* editors – leaving, arriving, needed!**

With this issue we welcome Ana Vilenica as a new East and Central European editor. Ana also did the covers for this issue and the last one, and is inaugurating a visuals working team. We also say farewell to Ana Margarida Esteves, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Helge Hiram Jensen, David Landy and Anna Szolucha. Our thanks go out to them for all the work they've done over the years in developing the journal, keeping it going in hard times and making connections with new generations of activists and movements.

We're also looking for a new editor with IT skills to join the IT / website working group. We publish on Wordpress.org, using files created in Word and social media outlets on Twitter and Facebook. Like all our editorial work, this is voluntary and collective. If you're interested in activist media, please contact Laurence Cox at [laurence.cox AT mu.ie](mailto:laurence.cox@mu.ie).