

Villa miseria también es América: Resistance and Resilience in Argentinian Slums During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The concepts of “resistance” and “resilience” are at the core of the lifestyle of *villeros*, the inhabitants of the slums of Buenos Aires. For these underrepresented communities, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic represents only one of the challenges that living in unregulated residential areas implies. Raised in geographical areas non-suitable for life, Argentinian slums are usually affected by unpredictable climatic phenomena and social plagues that our myopic judgment struggles to identify. Since January 2020, we are witnesses to and protagonists of an extraordinary, global phenomenon that will permanently change the way we perceive our environmental and social surroundings. COVID-19 pushes us to reevaluate issues of social awareness, class, and global justice and to provide long-term solutions that, hopefully, will prevent vulnerable communities from considering measures such as social distancing as a luxury.

Keywords: Argentinian slums, COVID-19, pandemic, resilience, *villa miseria*

On a mid-March night, at 9pm, residents of Buenos Aires showed up on their balconies to applaud the sanitary personnel and those on the front lines of the pandemic. “Esta no es la película que elegimos, pero todos somos protagonistas.” With these words, Argentinian actress Norma Aleandro opened a viral video created with the collaboration of the Argentinian society of actors—the Sociedad Argentina de Gestión de Actores Intérpretes (SAGAI)—in order to cheer up the acting community. Life, at the time of a pandemic, feels like a sci-fi movie.

Global literature has always fantasized on how humanity would react to a pandemic. Past masterpieces by Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and William Shakespeare, but also contemporary novels—such as *The Andromeda Strain* (1969) by Michael Crichton, *The Stand* (1978) by Stephen King, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and *Station Eleven* (2014) by Emily St. John Mandel, among others—offer catastrophic scenarios caused by implacable viruses or recall past pandemic diseases to reflect, in metaphorical ways, on humanitarian disasters. Soon, “2020” might become the title of some kind of dystopian novel or movie and, unfortunately, we will be its protagonists.

During the “Covid and the Environment Webinar” organized by the Environmental Resilience Institute (ERI) on May 6, 2020, Charlotte Rogers inspired her audience by suggesting that the virus SARS-CoV-2 teaches that the delicate balances that uphold our planet might lead to the realization of creative ecological practices aimed at reinforcing global connections and providing long-term solutions to contemporary crises. Every disaster provides an opportunity to

rethink our relationships with our social and physical environment. Having the intellectual privilege of registering real-time reactions to global phenomena is not something that happens every day. All social spheres are being affected at the same time by the same “invisible enemy,” from food industry and culture, to global and local policies, justice, and environmental studies. We are the witnesses to a global phenomenon that is changing the way we think about human fragility and resistance. Are we going to learn something from this global pandemic? Are we going to build large-scale individual and public policies? We need our socio-political system to be resilient, to recover and protect vulnerable populations.

Forced to stay at home for several weeks, people are becoming more or less consciously experts in what Rob Walker calls “the art of noticing.” This forced lockdown is a time to contemplate our surroundings actively: seeing wildlife repopulating the streets of global metropolises can help us reconsider our anthropocentric perspective. Understanding how individuals from different cultures and geographical areas react to this pandemic can sharpen our social consciousness. Experiencing situations of discomfort might suggest that some individuals are leading a privileged existence, unrealistically detached from everyday emergencies. In fact, while nature as a whole is constantly affected by disruptive upheavals—such as deforestation, habitat loss, and diseases—and while asylum seekers, climate refugees, immigrants, and other categories of unsheltered human beings are affected by calamities on a daily basis, our judgment is myopic when it comes to a deep understanding of global realities.

Thanks to the progress achieved in the field of Environmental Humanities, we are seeing a rebalancing between the role of humans and that of the natural realms of which we indissolubly form part. Given this, we are unfortunately still far from observing consistent improvements in the way some individuals consider others. Adapting this concept to one of the ten commandments instituted by the Major in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), we could say that all humans are equal, but some humans are more equal than others.¹ Social inequality is a pandemic even more dangerous than COVID-19. This imbalance is easily perceivable in global metropolitan areas, which are microcosms where injustice and deprivation are a terrifying plague.

The aim of this article is to spread awareness on the effects of COVID-19 on unsheltered urban areas. By lending a voice to underrepresented communities, this essay offers a general depiction of how Argentinians reacted to the spread of the pandemic, proving their resistance and resilience. Considering that we are still in the midst of a global pandemic, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct a well-defined picture of the socio-cultural effects of COVID-19. Due to the lack of academic studies on the topic, the present article wishes to update the reader on the latest newspapers’ studies and governmental analysis published

1 The original quote reads “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell 17).

by American and Argentinian presses about the situations of the slums of Buenos Aires from February 2020 to August 2020. Geographically, the present analysis is confined to Capital Federal and the urban agglomeration known as Gran Buenos Aires as, in view of the dimensions of the Argentinian country, the socio-economic situation of its inhabitants can considerably vary according to the regions that are being investigated.

The global response to the coronavirus disease has resulted in profound changes to society that are impacting human well-being and environmental health in complex ways. Daily habits are now changing for everyone. Nevertheless, while part of the global population complains about the quality of their virtual meetings, or about the lack of supplies that prevent them from finding the yeast necessary to bake, the rest of it is living in toxic environments, where food insecurity is a real challenge. If quarantine makes deprivation a holistic reality, its consequences are not the same for everyone. For example, for the social actors residing in Argentinian slums, where infrastructure and healthcare are inadequate, social distancing is a luxury as entire families are forced to share the same bathrooms and crockery.

According to the data offered by the World Health Organization (WHO), the WHO was first informed of a pneumonia of unknown causes detected in Wuhan (China) on December 31, 2019. A month later, on January 30, the outbreak was declared a public health emergency of international concern. On February 11, the mortal disease received a name, COVID-19, and the virus provoking the illness was identified as a severe acute respiratory syndrome called SARS-CoV-2. Within a couple of months, with the majority of the population locked in their homes, institutions, organizations, and global governances started to use social media to communicate the latest updates on the spreading of the virus. According to the data published in *Americas Quarterly* and *The Nation*, immediately after experiencing the first, detrimental effects of the virus, Argentina offered a rapid response to COVID-19, with a mandatory, nation-wide lockdown and travel ban. These measures had different consequences for the slum dwellers.

The data published in 2019 by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC) and updated on April 2020 show that 25.9% of Argentinian dwellings are considered under the poverty line and 5.7% of these residential areas are non-suitable for life.² In the country, 2.2 million people live in these

2 According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC), 35.5% of the entire Argentinian population is considered to live under the poverty line. According to the definition offered by INDEC in 2016: “La línea de indigencia se establece a partir del valor monetario de la Canasta Básica Alimentaria, que representa a los productos requeridos para la cobertura de un umbral mínimo de necesidades energéticas y proteicas de cada miembro del hogar. La línea de pobreza representa el valor monetario de una Canasta Básica Total (CBT), canasta de bienes y servicios obtenida a través de la ampliación de la Canasta Básica Alimentaria. Los hogares cuyos ingresos sean menores a la CBT se caracterizan en el estudio como pobres” (11).

miserable conditions. The Observatorio de la Deuda Social de la Universidad Católica Argentina (ODSA) estimated that there are more than four thousand slums in the country. In this situation, during the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of people are spending months in a mandatory lockdown. In an interview for the newspaper *Crux*, Father Fabian Belay, coordinator of the “pandemic crisis task-force” of the Archdiocese of Rosario, declared:

Keeping up with the mandatory isolating measures when the sun hits on the metallic roof of the one-room more than one generation calls “home” is not easy. People are doing their best in these popular neighborhoods to maintain the isolation, but our goal is “community isolation,” meaning that nobody goes in or out of the neighborhood.

INDEC reported that, in Argentina, 12.5% of the entire population is classified as “NBI” (Necesidades Básicas Insatisfechas), which means that it is officially unemployed, and it lacks essential resources, such as running water and electricity. Often, these individuals work informally as bricklayers, cleaners, and street vendors, and are paid under the table. This means that they do not receive official forms of support from governmental and local institutions and that they do not have healthcare or pension funds.³ For them, social isolation has a different meaning than for the rest of the population, as it implies the existence of hygienic, economic, and social supplies and norms that do not apply to these unsheltered areas. Nevertheless, informal social organizations and NGOs—such as Techo, Observatorio del Derecho a la Ciudad, directed by Jonatan Emanuel Baldiviezo, and the Argentinian social movement Barrios de Pie coordinated by Silvia Saravia—are trying to support these “invisible” urban communities by delivering food and medicines and attending to the children and the elderly. Sadly, civil engagement is not enough to support these overpopulated areas. How did it all begin?

Before the urban and rural conformation of Argentina underwent permanent modifications at the end of the 19th century, the country faced the progressive creation of “Gran Buenos Aires,” which included much of the city like the suburbs and villages. This geographical extension favored contacts between indigenous communities, creoles, and immigrants causing identity conflicts, but also facilitating the development of a hybrid and syncretic society. Since the

3 In 1943, the Argentinian government established the Dirección Nacional de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social, an organization that in 1949 became the Ministry of Health. This important step led to the expansion of social rights and social security, but, at the same time, it caused the development of a fragmented system divided into three subcategories of users: low-income social groups, who do not have social security, salaried workers and retirees, and the sectors of the population whose economic status allowed them to purchase private insurance. The first two categories do not receive pension contributions (Belló 100).

1880s, the massive diasporic movements affecting Argentina inspired several writers—such as Antonio Argerich, Jorge Luis Borges, Eugenio Cambaceres, and Lucio Vicente López—who reflected on the changes that technological development and immigration were producing within the urban and rural landscape of the country. Between 1870 and 1885, Buenos Aires became the capital of the Argentine Republic. Its urban transformation led to a rapid process of expansion and modernization in the fields of urban planning, hygiene, and electricity. Technology and architectural advances started to dominate the urban landscape and new buildings extended towards the *pampas*, erasing the boundaries that used to divide the city from the countryside. The 1930s, as María Gabriela Muñiz recalls, were characterized by an economic depression that led many rural inhabitants to settle in the suburbs of the city of Buenos Aires seeking for better job opportunities.

These people were not provided with solutions for their housing needs and, therefore, built their homes on public land with any discarded material they could procure. In 1976, during the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, 208,783 people were eradicated from Argentinian slums through racist campaigns promoting intimidation and xenophobia (Casabona and Guber 24). Although the regime attempted to eradicate these communities several times in the 1970s and 1980s, their resilience persisted. As a result of internal migration processes, the *villas* began to expand. During the 1990s, the socio-economic changes that affected Buenos Aires resulted in a profound reconfiguration of urban space, and the crisis affecting Argentina between 1998 and 2002 led to decreasing state intervention and increasing inequality and unemployment rates.

What happened in Argentina is common history for many other countries in the Global South, as can be observed in Mike Davis' critical study, *Planet of Slums* (2005), where the author offers an holistic depiction of the misery and vulnerability experienced in urban settlements. Davis notices that, according to the United Nations, more than one billion people live in irregular residential areas around the world. The negative side effect of the uncontrolled expansion of urban centers, such as Buenos Aires, can determine the spread of social exclusion, marginalization, and violence. In contemporary metropolises, these dynamics are enhanced by the presence of “formal sectors” (city center, subcenter, and neighborhoods) and “informal sectors” (slums and peripheries). According to Jorge Mario Jáuregui, this dichotomy determines a “trauma urbano” (125) that causes the loss of individuality and the dissociation between the human subjects living in the “informal sector” and the rest of the population.

As Javier Auyero and Debora Swistun claim in “The Social Production of Toxic Uncertainty” (2008), slums and other illegal residential areas represent the last step of the urban spatial hierarchy and affect both the social and the physical landscape. The emergence of low-income slums in Argentina is determined by the fact that, in most cases, city services and infrastructure lag behind in the

accommodation of high concentrations of people in urban areas that do not adequately support their inhabitants.⁴ Some of these unofficial neighborhoods are built on public land and are developed by using recycled construction material, such as wood, cardboard, and tin. Some others are planned by the government as a way to provide cheap and accessible accommodation to immigrant workers.

Despite the presence of a labor market and the consumption of urban goods and services, most of Argentinian slums do not constitute a well-defined urban social space within the boundaries of the city. Due to job insecurity and unemployment, the unprotected sectors of urban populations can hardly be integrated in a concrete and satisfactory way into the productive system of society. Slums become “invisible cities.” Not only society, but also urban configuration contributes to its marginalization in physical and metaphorical ways. Usually, these residential areas are geographically separated from the rest of the city by natural or artificial barriers. For example, Villa Celina—protagonist of the eponymous novel by Juan Diego Incardona—is located between the Matanza River and Avenida General Paz, while Villa 31 and Villa 31 bis are separated from the rich neighborhoods of Retiro and Recoleta by the highway Arturo Umberto Illia and the railway Ferrocarril San Martín. This spacial collocation determines that slums are not easily visible to the average citizen and this factor contributes to the spread of an imaginary that depicts the *villa* as a receptacle of social fears, a disturbing space, a sub-city to avoid. Despite their social and architectural relevance, slums seem to be considered as an abnormal, non-urban excrescence of the city. They are commonly associated with undesirable characteristics, such as crime, violence, social disintegration, and poverty. Slums are what Michel Foucault would define as “heterotopias,” a space characterized by different layers of meaning, relationships, and connections:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from

4 This determines a conflict between “biopolitics”—which, according to Michel Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), deals with individuality and subjectivity—and “biopower”—which, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), is defined as the control exercised by institutions over the entire population: “[a] power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (137).

all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (3-4).

Similar to a heterotopia, slums are considered parallel, invisible spaces, utopias (non-places) in the real sense of the word. Sometimes their inhabitants, the *villeros*, are truly socially “invisible” as they often hide their place of residence for fear of being discriminated against or incurring legal problems. Xenophobia, rejection of minority communities, and anguish towards poverty are feelings that have to be eradicated in contemporary societies. In fact, these unregulated areas are not only a receptacle of social problems, but also a place where individuals constantly prove their resilience by fighting against the lack of governmental protection and issues of racism and xenophobia.

Recently, we are witnessing small changes in the ways these urban spaces are perceived. As María Gabriela Muñiz recalls, “The marginal place has become a center of attention/attraction due to an increasing spectacularization in the media of violence, poverty and social marginality” (8). Muñiz’s words refer to the tendency of commercializing these realities as proved by the local spread of agencies that promote the so-called *turismo villero* or by the presence of themed souvenirs. In addition to the touristic sector, literature and art are shifting the focus of attention towards these vulnerable communities. What was previously seen as a subculture today has greater dissemination in the media and, consequently, greater social acceptance. Novels, documentaries, and movies represent fictionally and realistically these urban spaces. Visual artists—such as street painters and muralists—and musicians—in the form of the popular genre known as *cumbia villera*—also encapsulate the lifestyle of the slum dwellers. These new aesthetic facets have the merit of conferring a protagonist role to the inhabitants of Argentinian slums but, at the same time, are at risk of diminishing the dramatic challenges that *villeros* have to face every day.

When the first settlements started to appear in Argentina, the general opinion was that the dwellers of shantytowns would have been able to leave their housing thanks to their efforts and the support of local authorities. Instead, a number of studies started to provide evidence that shantytowns were growing as a result of people not being able to afford their rent or to buy official properties. In her attentive studies on the slums of the Global South, Tanja Bastia explains that there are four key structural elements that influence social exclusion in urban settings: unemployment, housing, immigrant status, and social differentiation based on race and ethnicity (89). These factors make it difficult for people to permanently leave the *villas*. As a result, becoming a permanent dweller of these unregulated residential areas is not always a choice. Despite high crime rates, precarious housing, and the absence of public services, housing is much cheaper than in other places within the city. This factor allows immigrants and other

dwellers to save the money necessary to support family members and maintains the possibility of returning, eventually, to their place of origin.

To denounce the miserable situation characterizing the lives of these vulnerable communities, in 1957, Argentinian author Bernardo Verbitsky published *Villa miseria también es América*, re-edited in 2003. Influenced by the aesthetic sensibilities of “social realism,” Verbitsky represents the universe of the slum through a documentary-like lens, creating a hybrid novel at the crossroads between journalism and literature. Throughout his novel, Verbitsky offers accurate descriptions aimed at representing the misery of the *villa*, the humanity of its inhabitants, and their resilience and solidarity, by denouncing the lack of social and governmental protection. Verbitsky explores the uncertainty characterizing the lives of his young protagonists, the dwellers of the outskirts of Buenos Aires. In his work, the city becomes a map of the human psyche leading to the exploration and representation of the challenges faced by the individual. Verbitsky’s novel is not the only one focused on Argentinian slums, nor is it the most recent approximation of this topic. In fact, there are many theorists and critics interested in the peculiarity of the urban space represented by the slum—such as Beatriz Sarlo, Josefina Ludmer, Dianna Niebylski, Fernando Reati, Martin Lienhar—and several novels written about the cultural and social aspects characterizing “el estilo de vida villero,” such as *La Villa* (2001) by César Aira, *Puerto Apache* (2002) by Juan Carlos Martini, and *Cuando me muera quiero que me toquen cumbia* (2003) by Cristián Alarcón. What makes *Villa miseria también es América* a detailed documentary of the resilience of the inhabitants of Argentinian slums is the representation of the different sorts of calamities that affect them on a daily basis. For these communities, catastrophes such as COVID-19 have devastating consequences that, most of the time, differ in terms of magnitude from what happens to the rest of the population. In this vulnerable situation, tragedies such as the spread of a global pandemic can lead to massive socio-economic challenges that can be hard to evaluate from an outside perspective. Moreover, the architectural structure and the geographical location of these unregulated residential areas increase their fragility and expose them to unexpected environmental phenomena.

For example, in April 2013, the northeastern section of the province of Buenos Aires experienced several flash floods that cost the lives of more than one hundred people between the cities of Capital Federal and La Plata and the urban agglomerations known as Gran La Plata and Gran Buenos Aires. The extremely heavy rainfall led to flash floods, transportation routes were submerged, and the majority of the population experienced power shortages. The general director of Civil Defense announced in an interview with *El País* that 155 cm of water (around 5 feet) inundated the streets of the capital. According to CNN and BBC reports, in three days, from April 1 to April 3, more than three thousand people were evacuated. The situation in the *villas* was miserable. Vast portions

of the local slums located on the north side of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, such as Barrio Mitre, were underwater. While efforts were made in order to rescue the victims of the flood still trapped in their homes, and evacuation centers were prepared, local charities collected donations of food, water, diapers, and mattresses. If the situation was dramatic for the whole country, slum dwellers were particularly affected and deprived of means of sustainability. This is only one example of the extremely delicate balance that characterizes the lives of *villeros*.

Floods are a common threat in these areas, and Verbitsky, as a careful reporter of the resilience and resistance demonstrated by the inhabitants of the *villa*, does not omit it. The words *lluvia* and *agua* are used precisely 100 times throughout his novel. Water is, at the same time, a source of life and death. On the one hand, it periodically destroys the hand-made houses of the community through massive floods, as the slum arises in a geographical area non-suitable for construction. On the other hand, it allows people to drink, cook, and maintain their families. The dramatic life conditions of the inhabitants of Argentinian slums, as depicted by Verbitsky, are far from being a matter confined to the 1950s and 1960s, the time when the novel was written and disseminated. As Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (2003), one of the main problems of contemporary life is that the spread of modernity and the fluidity of human capital have given rise to growing quantities of human beings who are deprived of adequate means of survival. Sustainability is a serious issue, provoking difficult interactions between global citizens, and spreading xenophobia, security paranoia, and social anxiety towards immigrants, asylum seekers, and other minorities.

While unexpected events, such as floods and pandemics, affect the entirety of the population, their consequences have different weights according to the socio-economic status of certain communities. On March 20, Argentinian president Alberto Fernández proclaimed the beginning of a period of social distancing. Concurrently with the commencement of the southern hemisphere's winter, the situation in Argentina got worse. In June 2020, Argentina's number of days in isolation exceeded the length of that undertaken in Wuhan. As Veronica Smink underlines in her report for the BBC, while the world was applauding the efficiency of one of the longest lockdowns of the planet, the internal reaction of Argentina was different, especially in Buenos Aires, which hosts the majority of the confirmed cases registered by August 2020.

In the slums of Buenos Aires, the situation is dramatic. Living in precarious conditions, often without water and electricity, more than four thousand vulnerable neighborhoods have to respect a "communitarian quarantine," as a form of protection imposed by the government. With the closure of social centers and work activities, the majority of *villeros* are losing their jobs and, with that, the opportunity of feeding their families and providing them with

other basic necessities. On a daily basis, national television and social media show images of dwellers struggling to respect health measurements, and, as a consequence, the cases are increasing, as tests performed on the inhabitants of slums such as Villa 31 and Villa 1-11-14 show. Clearly, collecting precise data on the health status of these vulnerable sectors of the population and on their working condition is nearly impossible to do.

The situations of the 17 million Argentines living in the province of Buenos Aires are difficult to register and quantify. According to the INDEC, 44 million Argentines require food assistance. To support these communities, during the past months, the government, the municipality, local organizations, and the army have offered monetary contributions and physical assistance to this part of the population in need by distributing food and medicine. According to the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, the inhabitants of Argentinian slums are given the opportunity to call a centralized phone number in order to receive help concerning COVID-19. Unfortunately, most of the time, ambulances and doctors cannot access the patient due to architectural impediments, such as narrow streets and lack of space. No matter how universal and equal the anti-COVID-19 measures are, they are not able to provide the same support to the whole population. Even if several non-profit and governmental organizations—such as the association *Manos de la Cava*, the San José congregation, and the Argentinian army—are offering their support daily, the emergency is far from being solved.

Despite the current difficult situation, in regard to the spread of COVID-19, Argentina has shown itself, once again, to be a resilient country. Several sectors of society, from regular workers, to the members of the educational system, and the health personnel, made great sacrifices in order to guarantee physical and emotional support for the community. While doctors, nurses, and volunteers worked exhausting shifts to provide the assistance necessary to fight the consequences of this pandemic, artists and cultural organizations offered their contributions by sharing their home-produced work not only through online exhibitions and recorded performances, but also live, in front of virtual audiences. For instance, on March 26, Red Solidaria invited several well-known artists to take part in the project “Argentina canta en cuarentena.” At 8:50pm selected artists sang “Como la cigarra” by the famous singer María Elena Walsh, whose hopeful message is an invitation to continue singing despite the difficult times. What is happening in Argentina is just one example of the wide range of projects that have been generated recently throughout the globe in order to share psychological comfort and social awareness during quarantine. The humanities, in both their traditional and innovative forms, play a fundamental role in the registration and elaboration of innovative strategies aimed at responding to global crises. Too often, human sciences are considered merely as witnesses to the significant crises of contemporary life. Yet, their intellectual formation is deeply resonant with the displacement of values and the revision of norms that shape

the transitional narratives of the planet. The spread of a global pandemic urges us to rethink our relationships with concepts such as physical and metaphorical borders, social constructs, human rights, and the role of humanities in collecting and interpreting these phenomena.

This study does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis of the reaction of Buenos Aires to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reality of Argentina, as a country, can sometimes differ considerably from the social phenomena affecting the capital. At the same time, it is not possible to holistically recount the dynamics of resistance that are characterizing the metropolises of the Global South and its inhabitants. This analysis aims at offering an emblematic example of resilience that can be evaluated as a paradigm of the different socio-political factors involved in a global crisis. The spread of COVID-19 and the reaction of the Argentinian population reveal how complicated an urban system is and how superficial opinions can be towards the reaction of a country in a catastrophe. Metropolises are the juxtaposition and sedimentation of cultures, social practices, and psychological nuances that cannot be judged based on the actions taken by the political class and its representatives. The challenges faced by the dwellers of Argentinian slums during the COVID-19 pandemic are just one example of how differently the consequences of planetary crises are perceived by the individuals who form part of urban communities.

Since January 2020, we are witnesses to and protagonists of an extraordinary global phenomenon that will permanently change the way we perceive class, social equality, and metropolitan issues. Right now, research is time sensitive. COVID-19 demands a rapid response from the academic community, which is called to collect information, reflections, and ideas through the production of interdisciplinary research and global collaborations. How will the global community address this need? What will be the role of social media, social activism, artistic performances, and academic studies in the intellectual reaction to this pandemic? What can we learn from the past but, most of all, from the present reality? Hopefully, this global pandemic will illuminate the future of academia, inviting scholars from all over the world to provide long-term solutions on issues connected to urban justice and social awareness.

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