

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

COVID-19 IN THE AMERICAS

INEQUALITIES, RESPONSE, AND IMPACT



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COVID-19 LAYS BARE VIOLENCE OF MARKET SYSTEM

By Tim W. Shenk, Editor

The COVID-19 pandemic was the story of 2020 and may be the story of 2021. It has been a global catastrophe not primarily because of the novel coronavirus itself, but because of the social and public health disasters that result from an economic system that prioritizes profit over people.

This issue of the CUSLAR Newsletter explores the inequalities in response and impact related to COVID-19 in the Americas.

In the United States and around the world, it has become painfully clear – clear as death, in too many cases – that the systems set up to govern our economic and political life are in direct contradiction to our fundamental rights to adequate food, housing, medical care and safety.

The pandemic has laid bare the violence of a system that calls workers “essential” at the same time as treating them as disposable. The virus sharpens an indictment on a system that makes the world’s poor decide between “staying home and starving or going to work and risking my life,” as Wisconsin immigrant worker Natalia Fajardo said.

Friends in the Dominican Republic report that the public health slogan, “Quédate en casa” (stay home), has been turned into a challenge to politicians: “Quédate en mi casa” (Try staying at my house). In many multi-genera-

tional families in poor neighborhoods, when everyone is home from work and school at the same time, not everyone fits in the house.

Elsewhere in Latin America, the pandemic has been a backdrop for surprising levels of mobilization despite contagion risks. In Bolivia, the MAS Party of Evo Morales returned to power with the resounding victory of Luis Arce against the coup government. In Chile, more than three-quarters of voters called to draft a new constitution to replace the one in place since the Pinochet dictatorship. And Peru saw three presidents in a ten-day stretch in November.

This issue of the CUSLAR Newsletter highlights experiences of the pandemic in Cuba, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Dominican Republic and the United States.

A country’s wealth, it turns out, does not determine how it will respond to a crisis of this scale. More prescient is the orientation of our institutions. Are they set up to promote and protect profit at the expense of human life? Or do they put people first? In places where our right to live is not respected, the task before us is to come together to build the power, in the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “to force the power structure to say ‘yes’ when they may be desirous of saying ‘no.’” May 2021 be just such a year.

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AMID GLOBAL PANDEMIC, NEED FOR COMMUNITY CENTERED HEALTHCARE IS MORE URGENT THAN EVER

By Daniela Rivero

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a harsh light on the failures of the U.S. healthcare system. With over 10 million total cases and an estimated 238,000 deaths, many of which may have been preventable, the need for structural change and access to healthcare for all is undeniable.

Despite its disastrous handling of the pandemic, the Trump administration insisted on demonizing countries like China and Cuba, blaming China for the virus and doubling down on ongoing efforts to delegitimize Cuba's international medical brigades. The U.S. even went as far as tightening sanctions on Cuba, exacerbating the already scarce conditions on the island due to the embargo.

Precisely because the U.S. government has so adamantly tried to disavow Cuba's healthcare achievements, it is worth inquiry so as to compare two systems that are at complete odds with each other. I argue for Cuba's holistic, preventative healthcare system that is based on community care and international solidarity as an alternative to the U.S. model that privileges corporations and money over the lives of millions.

Most of us are familiar with the way healthcare works in the United States. Hours spent in waiting rooms, extensive paperwork, bureaucratic hurdles with health insurance companies, and at the end of it all, expensive medical bills that for many, end up being financially crippling. A 2019 study published by the American Journal of Public Health found that medical debt was the leading cause of bankruptcy in the United States, with an estimated 535,000 claiming bankruptcy each year over healthcare related costs. It is also worth noting that the study reported this issue continued under the Affordable Care Act.

The shortcomings of the healthcare system extend far beyond presidential cycles. The coronavirus pandemic has revealed that the existing medical system in the United States is not only unequipped to handle such a disaster. Rather, it is fundamentally structured to serve the wealthy and make money for pharmaceutical and insurance corporations. A 2019 Atlantic article quotes a former CEO of Pfizer, one of the companies developing the COVID-19 vaccine, as saying that "it is the anticipated income stream, rather than repayment of sunk costs, that is the primary determinant of price [of pharmaceuticals]." With millions of Americans unemployed, the government's COVID-19 relief package



consisted of a meager \$1,200 given out in the spring while billionaires in the U.S. saw their net worth increase by over \$1 trillion. Forbes reported that many in the insurance sector such as United Health Group and Aetna saw their profits double during the second quarter of 2020.

Despite enduring conditions of economic scarcity under the blockade, the Cuban government provides free, compulsory healthcare while spending only a fraction of what the U.S. spends on medical care annually. Cuba's medical system has been proven time and time again to outperform the United States. The Atlantic reported that Cuba only spends \$813 per person annually on health care compared with \$9,403 in the U.S. Cuba maintains the same life expectancy and lower infant mortality rates.

This vast difference in costs can be attributed to the fact that Cuba's approach to healthcare is centered around preventative care rather than reactionary treatment. After the revolution in 1959, the Cuban government under Fidel Castro nationalized healthcare and made all healthcare free and compulsory for everyone.

This model relies heavily on primary care doctors, resulting in a ratio of around 6.7 physicians for every 1000 people compared to the 2.8 U.S. (PHCPI) Community doctors are a central part of every neighborhood in Cuba, and close relationships with patients is emphasized. Yearly check-ups may look like physicians visiting people in their homes and extensively surveying not only their health, but their employment status, home life, and any other factors that may contribute to their

health. From there, patients are placed into high or low risk categories to determine how often they should be seeing physicians. Because resources in Cuba are so scarce, community doctors have relied on close monitoring and preventative methods to maintain community health.

While the U.S. government has failed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, other countries like Cuba and Vietnam that have universal healthcare have become important models for other countries in the structuring of their healthcare systems and their handling of COVID-19. Cuba in particular has demonstrated that their preventative, holistic and accessible healthcare system is able to handle a disaster such as COVID-19 better than many much wealthier countries, proving that a healthy system of medical care functions based on community centered care and solidarity.

It's important to note the lengths to which the U.S. has gone to maintain the embargo on Cuba. In 2019, the United Nations General assembly voted overwhelmingly to lift the embargo for the 28th consecutive year, with only Brazil backing the United States.

We might then consider that the way the U.S. has treated Cuba reflects how it treats its own people, and how the flagrant inequality and profit based healthcare system in the U.S. has created a blockade on poor and working class people's access to healthcare.

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THE WORST OF THE WORST? BRAZIL UNDER PANDEMIC AND BOLSONARO

by Beatriz Vieira and Flávio Limonci

The struggle against the pandemic in Brazil has proved to be very worrisome under the government of Jair Bolsonaro. Unscientific speech and disregard for life add to fake news and management problems to deepen historical violence and dissolve the thin civilizing varnish that existed in the country. The result could not be different: more than 180 thousand deaths and 6 million positive COVID-19 cases at the time of this writing, at the beginning of December 2020.

Bolsonaro's election to the presidency in 2018 can be understood in two ways. First, as the result of a particular moment – a crisis in the Workers' Party, the politically motivated arrest of former President Inacio "Lula" Da Silva, and the stabbing of Bolsonaro during his candidacy. Or, Bolsonaro's ascent can be read as a result of the longstanding contradictions of Brazilian society: incomplete emancipation, non-incorporation of all Brazilians into the imagined national community, the path of violence as a way of "solving" conflicts, and repression as a form of social control. His government presents itself as a conservative revolution: the beginning of a new era, breaking with outdated archaic practices to build a fusion of old and new.

From the economic perspective, the "new" is characterized by an emphasis on the market economy to overcome the legacy of State intervention in social and economic life, inaugurated by Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s. At the same time, the historical neglect, or even rejection, by the Brazilian ruling classes of the social and economic incorporation of social majorities, including through the market, is reproduced and deepened. Crowning this process, we see the announcement of the privatization of state or mixed-owned companies, such as Eletrobrás and Correio (electric utilities and the post office), and the support for the expansion of mining industry and agribusiness, for the benefit of which labor and environmental protection laws were dismantled and militias (paramilitary or private security groups) were tapped to violently control any "rebellion." Although an emergency income distribution plan for the most vulnerable segments of the population has been created, unemployment is increasing, as well as the number of homeless people. The spending-limit policy has resulted in underfunding of the public Unified Health System (SUS), reducing the supply of beds and supplies.



From a political point of view, the government says it aims to renew customs and practices, defending morality and denying clientelism. Yet at the same time, it puts up roadblocks to carrying out the Car-Wash Operation, the Office of the Public Prosecutor's investigation into corruption. In addition, the administration surrenders to political machines as a way to obtain political support amid accusations of corruption in the presidential family and links to militias in Rio de Janeiro, including alleged attempts to control investigations under the responsibility of the Federal Police.

In face of the pandemic, the government view of Brazilian federalism is also problematic. After a decision by the Brazilian Supreme Court that states and municipalities have jurisdiction to decree measures to restrict circulation, social distance and the use of masks, the Union practically gave up its role of coordinating public policies of national scope, and attributed to subnational federated entities the responsibility for the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

Concerning culture, the government reveals its ultra-conservative face, based on the traditional family, heteronormativity, guns, drug prohibition and an anti-modern worldview, linked to neo-Pentecostal denominations. The Ministry of Culture became a mere secretariat under the Ministry of Tourism and, at one point, was handed over to an admirer of Nazi aesthetics. In general, cultural, educational and environmental policies are under the leadership of

disciples of Olavo de Carvalho, a prominent Brazilian known for his disdain for science. These leaders, now in key posts in the government, are convinced that Brazil is taken by "cultural Marxism" – or, as they say: "gramscisms" – to be excised with ultra-conservative cultural policies. They have cut funding for public schools and universities and put constraints on journalists, teachers and artists. There, precisely, one of the contradictions of the government emerges: though ultraliberal in the economic realm, it denies the individual his/her autonomy for subjective, religious and intellectual choices, such as sexual life, Afro-Brazilian religions, and multicultural and Marxist approaches. The government's anti-scientific stance is also revealed in dealing with the pandemic: it simultaneously defends chloroquine without any scientific evidence and refuses the mandatory vaccine in the name of individual freedom.

This situation results in unemployment, underemployment, outsourcing and "uberization" of labor relations through apps that, during the pandemic, pay workers less and less. Brazil under the pandemic has seen growth in poverty, hunger, social vulnerability, and the misery of urban, rural and forest populations. We have suffered systematic deaths of young people from urban underdeveloped areas, most of whom are black under 25, as a result of the actions of police, militias and drug-dealers. We are faced with the potential genocide of indigenous tribes, whose territories are no longer respected by miners, loggers, miners and producers of

soy and cattle, who have the support of the government. Indigenous tribes are also obligated to deal with both accidental and criminal forest fires in the Amazon and Pantanal forests. We are also suffering increased violence against women and feminicides.

During the first months of the quarantine, Brazilian society watched this general picture, perplexed, frightened and demobilized. As time went on, however, the first signs of mobilization and resistance have begun, especially in the peripheries of large cities and among uberized workers. It is

worth mentioning the surprisingly successful strikes of apps workers, as well as the creation of mutual support networks in the favelas (slums). Basic foods, soap and antibacterial gel are produced at home. “Radio pole,” a community system of communication, based on speakers tied to poles, clarifies health protocols. Through these and many more measures, vulnerable populations have sought – between resistance and despair – to build solidarity and collective solutions, which may point to opening horizons beyond the logic of capital.

Beatriz Vieira is a professor at State University of Rio de Janeiro. She is also a member of the Universidade da Cidadania Resiste, a project that brings together university, NGOs and grassroots movements.

Flávio Limonic is a university professor. For ten years he worked at the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analysis (IBASE), an NGO aimed at democratizing information and supporting popular movements.

DISPLACEMENT, VIOLENCE IN PANDEMIC-ERA COLOMBIA

by Kimberly St.Fleur



The climate in Colombia before the onset of the pandemic was fraught with tension. The country’s history contains perhaps the most grave contemporary humanitarian crisis in South America.

The armed conflict gave way to years of violence in Colombia, and its results are tragic. Almost 9 million people were registered as victims of the violence, with 8 million of these people becoming internally displaced. This placed Colombia as the country with the highest number of internally displaced people, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2019. Of these internally displaced people, a disproportionate amount are minorities, with 21 percent being Afro-Colombian and 25 percent being indigenous.

The coronavirus in Colombia, then, has had unequal effects, and the poor and displaced have suffered more. A significant part of the internally displaced people in Colombia depends on the informal sector to make ends meet. They have been left especially vulnerable in the face of the slowdown of economic activity. Women and the indigenous population are most heavily affected.

In addition to economic hardship, with national pandemic-induced lockdowns Colombia has seen a resurgence of violence and uncertainty. The targeted assassination of social leaders doubled in 2020 compared to 2019, as security capacity deteriorated especially in rural areas.

Read the full article at cuslar.org/colombiacovid.

CUBA, FROM PAGE 3

There has been a lot of discourse about how COVID-19 has been the great equalizer because a virus does not discriminate based on class or race. Yet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that poverty has been a decisive factor in infection and death rates.

In the United States, racial and economic inequalities are not incidental but rather foundational parts of the healthcare system. The government has made it clear that the priority lies in economic growth, and poor and working-class people remain the most vulnerable both because they have been forced to go back into the workforce in order to sustain themselves, and because they have more barriers preventing them from getting healthcare. Cuba’s medical system poses a threat to the U.S. model of healthcare and narrative of global leadership. Cuba’s health system shows in practice that there is a clear way forward to a healthier society by prioritizing people over profit.

Daniela Rivero is a senior at Ithaca College. She studies social movements and Latin American studies with a minor in art.

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS SOW SEEDS OF PEACE IN POST-WAR COLOMBIA

By Tim W. Shenk

On November 10, Andres Ruiz and Lilian Hall from the organization Sembrandopaz (“Sowing peace” in English) spoke to a diverse virtual audience hosted by CUSLAR about the challenges of grassroots peace-building in post-Civil War Colombia.

Ruiz has been a community liaison with Sembrandopaz for more than 10 years and has served as the leader of the Association of Victims of Pichilin for nine years. He has a range of community-wide responsibilities, including in the areas of reconciliation, community repair and agriculture.

Hall is a 1983 graduate of Cornell University’s International Agriculture program. She lived in Nicaragua for nearly 30 years and moved to the Montes de Maria region in 2012, “right at the time the secret peace talks started in Colombia, so a very interesting time.”

Sembrandopaz’s work is rooted in Montes de Maria, a northern subregion of Colombia, one of 16 designated areas where the armed conflict was most intense. Hall explained that the region is situated between the Caribbean Sea to the west and the Magdalena River to the east. This geographic position has made it a strategic corridor of contention for those trying to move illicit drugs from the interior of the country to the ocean and arms into the country from overseas.

Ruiz, a recognized community leader and directly impacted victim of the armed conflict, shared a brief timeline of violence in the region. In the 1980s, peasant groups began land takeovers from large landowners, and armed groups arrived in the region to defend one side or the other. One event in that time period that made international news was a “donkey bomb.” Members of the armed group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) loaded up a donkey with explosives and blew it up at a police station, killing nine officers and the donkey. By 1989 the peasant communities were being forced out of the rural areas into the towns. Hundreds of thousands of peasants became Internally Displaced People in a few short years.

By 1996, violence had started in earnest and the peasant farmers were caught in the middle. “As always in these types of situations,” he said via interpreter, “we peasants suffered the worst. We started to see targeted assassinations of our leaders and massacres in our towns.”

From 1996-2006, no fewer than eight armed groups fought over Montes de Maria, and 80 to 85 percent of the 135 massacres of civilians



were carried out by the government-supported paramilitaries. The paramilitary groups were tied to large landowners and ranchers, and they tried to kill, harass or displace peasants, often accusing them of being part of a clandestine guerrilla force. A common phrase used by the paramilitaries was, according to Ruiz: “Sell us your land or we’ll make a deal with your widow.”

Despite a massacre in his hometown of Pichilin, where 40 armed men came into the town and killed 12 people in 1994, Ruiz says that his people are resilient. “Even though this event fractured our community and generated fear and mistrust of outsiders, we have tried to overcome it. We love our land, and we’re tied to it. Almost everyone has been able to return.”

In 2014, peasants came together to develop a plan for repairing the communities, which the local government approved. Of the 17 points of action put forward, 13 have been implemented thus far, said Ruiz.

Ruiz also noted that the communities are vigilant about receiving aid from the state or NGOs: “Either you give it to all of us, or none of us.” Hall added that giving direct aid to some families and not to others breeds mistrust and resentment at a time when unity is required.

Sembrandopaz, whose full name is La Asociación Sembrando Semillas De Paz (Planting Seeds of Peace Association), is a nonprofit civil entity, legally founded in 2005. Its work builds on decades of previous experience the founders brought from past organizing.

“We’re still recuperating,” said Ruiz. “Our job is to re-weave the social fabric of our communities.” Sembrandopaz instills the values of a culture of peace through the formation and consolidation of grassroots organizations, in order to support sustainable human devel-

opment in the Caribbean region in Colombia.

Hall continued: “We see our work in the metaphor of a bird. One wing is the political culture wing. The communities need to know what their rights are. They need to know how the state functions. They need to know how to do nonviolent direct action if the state doesn’t listen to their needs. This is where we do our leadership development.”

Hall spoke about “constructive dialogues” the organization has held, where peasant leaders from the communities -- most of whom were direct victims of the armed conflict -- were able to speak directly to members of the FARC who had been active in the region and are now in resettlement camps in another area of Colombia.

The other wing of the Sembrandopaz bird is called “economics for good living.” “Peace with hunger can never last,” said Hall. “So we have to be sustainable. That’s the agroecology work, the environmental work with youth, and our organic farm, an ecological tourism site.”

Hall continued: “Because the bird can’t be in the air the whole time, it has two feet. One foot is Aesthetics and Art. The community arts team makes collaborative murals and teaches jewelry making using recycled materials. Just as people need peace and food, we also need beauty. The other foot is Ethics and Spirituality. Ethics is essential for everything, and we understand spirituality not as an earthly religious institution, but that we are all connected in the web of life.”

This Public Issues Forum was sponsored by CUSLAR, the Cornell Latin American Studies Program (LASP), the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies and the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA), and funded in part by the Cornell Student Activities Finance Commission.

DESIGUALDADES SOCIALES EN TIEMPOS DE CORONAVIRUS

Desafíos de la democratización de la Educación Superior en Argentina en el contexto pandémico. El caso de la Universidad Nacional Arturo Jauretche.

Por Prof. Nahue Luna, Lic. Cecilia Morales, Lic. Ariel Albornoz

María reside en Florencio Varela (Buenos Aires) a 15 cuadras de la Universidad y se encuentra en los últimos años de la carrera de Trabajo Social de la Universidad, vive con sus dos hijos, trabaja desde casa como empleada municipal y se ocupa del cuidado de todo su grupo familiar. Hace poco y apenas dictado el Aislamiento Social Obligatorio su marido se quedó sin trabajo. Ella se encuentra cursando cuatro materias cuatrimestrales que le permitirán poder iniciar su trabajo de tesis para concluir su carrera de grado. Se conecta 4 veces por semana a través de un dispositivo móvil que además comparte con su hijo de 5 años quien transita el preescolar.

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo visibilizar y reflexionar sobre las experiencias como las de María, una de muchas mujeres estudiantes en la Universidad Nacional Arturo Jauretche ubicada en la localidad de Florencio Varela, en el sur del conurbano de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, territorio urbano marcado por altos niveles de desigualdad y pobreza en Argentina. Iniciaremos con un breve recorrido histórico por el sistema universitario argentino y el nacimiento de esta Universidad Nacional, para luego adentrarnos en las experiencias biográficas y trayectorias académicas en el contexto actual, haciendo hincapié en el impacto desigual de este fenómeno en las vidas cotidianas de mujeres estudiantes pertenecientes a sectores populares.

La Universidad argentina históricamente ha participado en la consolidación y reproducción de las jerarquías sociales, diferencias económicas y de género. Sin embargo, la creación de un conjunto de nuevas universidades del conurbano en 2008 vinieron a poner en discusión el histórico carácter elitista de la Universidad y junto a ello, las desigualdades históricas en el acceso, permanencia, progreso y egreso efectivo de ciertos sectores a la Educación Superior. La Universidad Nacional Arturo Jauretche (UNAJ) se crea en el 2009 durante el gobierno de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, período que se caracterizó por poner en acto un proceso de ampliación de derechos sociales a partir del papel interventor del Estado.

La creación de estas instituciones de formación y a su vez el enfoque de derecho a la Educación Superior que desarrolló el Estado argentino como política social universal, posibilitó el ingreso de una población históricamente excluida. Así, la población estudiantil de la UNAJ viene principalmente de Florencio Varela, zona caracterizada por condiciones históricas de desigualdad en el conurbano sur. Adriana Chiroleau plantea en un ensayo del 2016 que este proceso de democratización externa refiere a la articulación entre la institución y la sociedad y da cuenta de la búsqueda de una mayor representación social de las clases o grupos sociales. El mismo fue posible en nuestro país principalmente por dos instancias claves: la gratuidad en la enseñanza universitaria y la ampliación del ingreso a la misma. Estos dos hechos marcan el recorrido histórico de la Universidad argentina, de manera significativa.

En el marco de los procesos de democratización externa mencionados, nos interesa pensar particularmente la experiencia de mujeres estudiantes de la carrera de Trabajo Social en el actual contexto pandémico, a través de su propio relato. La Carrera de Trabajo Social se aprobó por el Consejo Superior de la UNAJ el 29 de Mayo de 2015. Su incorporación a la oferta académica toma fundamento a partir a la vacancia de formación teórica y metodológica en intervención sobre problemáticas sociales en la región de influencia de la misma.

En este sentido el objetivo central de la formación profesional de los estudiantes es la intervención y la transformación de las condiciones sociales desiguales en los territorios en la cual se sitúa. La matrícula de Trabajo Social se compone con un alto porcentaje de mujeres (87,6%) característica que nos hace preguntarnos sobre sus particularidades a la hora de analizar el acceso, permanencia, progreso y egreso a la educación superior.

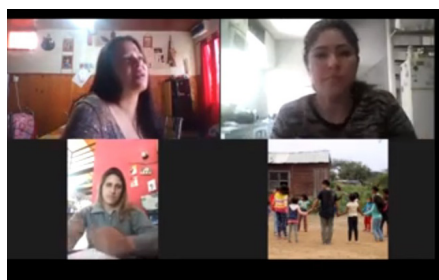
El acceso de las mujeres a la educación superior constituye una conquista tardía en la historia del derecho a la educación universitaria y representa grandes desafíos tanto para las instituciones como para ellas.

Si pensamos en la inserción de las mujeres provenientes de sectores populares en la UNAJ, se evidencia un despliegue particular de estrategias por parte de estas mujeres autodefinidas como: madres, trabajadoras, estudiantes, militantes y en muchos casos jefas de familia. Ellas han sabido construir y desplegar estas múltiples identidades para poder hacer frente al desafío de llegar, permanecer, avanzar y graduarse en la universidad.

Una de las mayores desigualdades sociales traducida en obstáculos para la trayectoria en la universidad es el trabajo doméstico, teniendo en cuenta que el trabajo doméstico está naturalmente equiparado a la condición de ser mujer. Es decir, en el sentido común está arraigado una construcción acrítica que enlaza al trabajo doméstico con la condición de ser mujer. Estas construcciones históricas equiparan la genitalidad con comportamientos sociales y se reproducen en el imaginario social de manera muy efectiva dejando de lado el pensamiento reflexivo o analítico.

Estos pensamientos tienen tanta efectividad en los imaginarios colectivos que sostienen desigualdades en las labores domésticas y las tareas de cuidado, construyendo y reproduciendo la idea que las mismas son responsabilidad exclusiva de las mujeres. Y si no los cumplen, son etiquetadas malas mujeres, malas madres. En este sentido, en los tiempos de la pandemia COVID-19, estas mujeres estudiantes se encuentran frente al desafío de sobrevivir a un tiempo de sobreexigencias en un contexto en el que las desigualdades socioeconómicas y los mandatos sociales se exacerban.

Las construcciones sociales que legitiman la desigualdad y las demandas sobre los cuerpos femeninos no cesan a pesar del excepcional contexto de pandemia, en el que se agrega un torbellino de trabajo virtual o “teletrabajo” que se tiene lugar en los hogares. Comprendemos que existe una constante incitación social a la hiperproducción y a la multifuncionalidad agudizada por las redes sociales y los medios de comunicación, de que “hay que hacer todo lo pendiente”: realizar ejercicio físico, comer mejor,



aprovechar el tiempo “perdido” con les hijes, tomar clases de yoga virtuales y meter el máximo de materias posible.

Las construcciones mediáticas apelan a la idea de una ama de casa feliz y satisfecha que puede con todo solo por amor. En los intercambios realizados con estudiantes mujeres en el contexto de pandemia, hubo dos expresiones que llamaron nuestra atención y que permiten comprender cómo se vivió este particular contexto al inicio del primer cuatrimestre en el 2020: “No puedo quedarme sin hacer nada”. “Voy a aprovechar la virtualidad para meter cinco materias”. Estas exigencias se hacen más profundas entre las mujeres quienes son las que además se ocupan del trabajo doméstico y las múltiples tareas de cuidado, casi exclusivamente.

En medio de esta desigualdad histórica, el miedo al fracaso se agudiza porque además de hacer de todo, hay que hacerlo bien, también hay que “triunfar”, y alcanzar logros y objetivos propios de ideales de mujeres que se imponen sin descanso al encender la televisión, mirar revistas y redes sociales. No obstante, la vida de las mujeres estudiantes de una universidad en el conurbano bonaerense tiene sus particularidades: no cuentan con un cómodo espacio para estudiar, ni con una computadora con una excelente conexión a internet y no pueden estar produciendo lo máximo posible para aprovechar “el tiempo muerto”.

Asimismo, no sólo no cuentan con una

computadora, en la mayoría de los casos, comparten el dispositivo móvil con el resto de las personas que conviven en el hogar, además de aprovechar los datos de internet, que no son muchos y se acaban rápido. Estas mujeres estudiantes, trabajadoras, madres, cuidadoras y en muchos casos militantes se encuentran frente al desafío de sobrevivir a un tiempo de sobreexigencias en un contexto en el que las desigualdades materiales marcan la diferencia.

A partir del recorrido histórico y el relato de las experiencias de las estudiantes de Trabajo Social en la actual pandemia, nos surge la siguiente pregunta y múltiples reflexiones: ¿La virtualización no tiene sentido en este contexto? Las universidades del conurbano tienen una función social que no tienen otras universidades tradicionales o de “élite”. Nuestras universidades, y la nuestra en particular, tiene la función de conectarnos, de construir con otros, trabajar colectivamente en los territorios, de intervenir cuando el otro lo necesita, de armar redes, de contener, de sabernos juntas. Y en esa tarea el rol docente y el rol de la universidad se vuelven fundamentales. Nos resulta interesante pensar la virtualidad como un desafío que deja latente la cuestión de la autonomía y del trabajo individual, frente al trabajo colectivo.

El desafío de construir procesos pedagógicos que tornen autónomas a nuestras estudiantes, que puedan reconocer y evaluar sus propios procesos educativos, identificando además cuándo pedir ayuda. Ser conscientes de las nuevas reglas que se imponen el contexto y la coyuntura, nos desafía a empatizar más que nunca con estudiantes, tener cuidado de no replicar las reglas de la presencialidad y las desigualdades propias de este formato serán las claves para lograr lo que consideramos lo más importante en este contexto de pandemia: mantener la humanidad como eje rector del proceso de enseñanza - aprendizaje y que permite en definitiva obtener calidad educativa. Frente al aislamiento al que la pandemia nos obliga, proponemos repensar prioridades.

Pensar la virtualidad lejos de estándares usuales, de logros, de objetivos usuales, porque este no es un contexto usual. En lugar de preocuparnos demasiado por conservar las paredes institucionales, jerarquías, procesos y métodos, este es un ti-

empo para la incomodidad y el aprendizaje. El desafío es pensar la virtualidad en función de las vidas reales de nuestras estudiantes, flexibilizando tiempos contenidos y procesos. Diversificando estrategias y creando propuestas acordes o coherentes con el contexto que atravesamos y con las trayectorias diversas que nuestras estudiantes presentan. Esperando que de este modo puedan cumplir de la mejor manera la multifuncionalidad y la sobreexigencia que la pandemia exagera en sus biografías y que puedan de una manera autónoma, manejando sus tiempos por ellas mismas, estudiar y reflexionar sobre las propuestas teóricas que se les presentan.

Fortalecer la idea de la autonomía permite flexibilizar las formas que se proponen para que las clases continúen y pensarlas en un marco de inclusión. De esta manera, se pone el desafío en la reflexión e interpretación de cada una de ellas: ¿cómo planteamos una autonomía apta y coherente para las estudiantes mujeres mientras no se pierda la necesidad de lo colectivo y el apoyo mutuo?

No podemos exigir las mismas reglas de una presencialidad como si la virtualización de las materias viniera a reemplazar las clases presenciales. Es imprescindible pensarlas como instancias distintas en un contexto difícil, pero que nos mantienen conectados y pensando juntas a la distancia. Seguiremos reflexionando para crear mecanismos más inclusivos que potencien la autonomía y que sostengan a les estudiantes en las aulas virtuales y reales.

Asumir los desafíos que nos presenta la pandemia seguramente implique ciertos costos, así como nos demanda tomar decisiones por una opción pedagógico-política frente a otras. Elegimos pensar en la universidad como un espacio de contención que garantice el derecho a la educación, sin reemplazar la humanidad por lógicas burocráticas descontextualizadas que la condenen. Procuremos que nuestros estudiantes transiten este recorrido de una manera coherente con sus realidades y con el compromiso que les caracteriza.

Prof. Nahue Luna, Lic. Cecilia Morales y Lic. Ariel Albornoz son docentes e integrantes del equipo de la carrera de Trabajo Social en la Universidad Nacional Arturo Jauretche, Florencio Varela, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

A QUARANTINE FAREWELL FOR FRANCISCO ANTONIO SANTOS

By Tim W. Shenk, Editor



On April 15, a mentor and friend, Francisco Antonio Santos, passed away in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Santos was a labor leader and a tireless fighter for the rights and dignity of all people. He survived the repressive Joaquín Balaguer regime and was instrumental in building working-class formation, analysis and organization for six decades. If not for the social distancing measures necessary to contain the coronavirus, April 24 would have been the novenario, or the large public grieving and celebration of his life.

It is the ninth day since the physical departure of Francisco Antonio Santos. The street in front of his house is not empty. Look again – the dry leaves, the shadows, the hot breath of the wind – they are us.

I am not quarantined, and neither are you. We are under a tarp in the middle of Calle Ira, barrio María Auxiliadora, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This short street, only one block long, has been closed at both ends by tattooed boys in Kobe and LeBron jerseys. They've put out a few orange cones they got from somewhere, and the tires are in place but not yet on fire.

It's fitting that his nueve días should fall on April 24th, a day to remember heroes. A day of insurrection against the loneliness of dying, the blind rage

of hunger. A day to prepare a new generation of dreamers and fighters, to put seeds in the earth. You and I and so many others will embrace anyone who comes close. Embrace, laughter, tears. Most of all, long silences. We're sweating through a summer afternoon that has come, like death, out of nowhere and before its time.

People are streaming in. Whole families disentangle themselves from atop motorcycles. People come on foot and on crutches, children running out ahead, sandals slapping the hot pavement. They come from the barrios in cars held together with wire and shoestrings. A pickup truck pulls up with 30 people in the back, and they hand down sacks of lemons, bunches of plátano and muddy bags full of yuca dug this morning.

They bring the dust from the road. Their cracked, hard hands are fists. They unfurl the flags of the campesino organizations: yellow and green, red and black. Each person is greeted with fruit juice and a welcome as warm as the day. Handkerchiefs are produced out of pockets to mop brows, then are used to dab at wet eyes. There are baseball caps from every team.

The coconut man puts the brake on his tricycle for a moment to say his pésame, to share his sorrow for the loss. The señora of the avocados lowers the tub from her head and goes inside

to give her ripest to the señora of the house. She is given juice and savors it. The mechanic from up the street has closed his greasy shop for the day. He is passing around a bottle of Brugal Extra Viejo that doesn't seem to run out.

There is only one argument all day. That's when a candidate for one of those piece-of-shit parties pulls up in his Lexus jeepeta and tries to make his way into the crowd. The boys on the corner tell him, not now. They tell him not to waste his time coming closer. Well, they don't say it in exactly those words. The candidate sees he doesn't have a great hand. His jeepeta roars and leaves a swirl of dust. The few people who notice the brief exchange make a mental note to thank the boys later.

This is my story, so I am going to say that what happens next is that Santos himself makes an appearance at his own nueve días. Santos is just another specter among all of the specters here today, and we're all happily haunting each other. Santos loves every minute. He looks younger, but with the same bald spot, the same mustache and the same hoarse laugh.

Among the stories being told under the tarps under the hot sun, are stories about la Central General de Trabajadores, the flag under which all of the labor unions stood as one. The CGT was, in the 70s, a primary target of the state's repressive

forces. The old men remember the strikes. They recall the printing presses printing illegal words with illegal ink, and the young men and women who slunk through the darkness stuffing pieces of paper into tailpipes of cars. The next morning when the cars started – ¡fuaaaa! – the paper flew like doves. The breezes took them to every door. The strike was announced.

Santos didn't cower. He was one of the few who dared to speak aloud and into a microphone to denounce the abuses of the Balaguer regime. This he paid for from time to time with jail time, but they didn't succeed in killing him like they killed many of those who walked by his side. He can be heard saying, "They who renounce their dreams, renounce life." He reminds the crowd that working people have never stopped dreaming or fighting for life. He sings. In his hoarse voice, he sings, and we stand with him. Agrupémonos todos, en la lucha final, y se alzan los pueblos con valor, ¡por la Internacional!

It's 6 PM. The heat hasn't given an inch. Out of the air appear plates piled high with food. Boiled plantains and green bananas with beef. With cod. With fried salami and eggs. What had happened was, a line of buses arrived in the after-

noon from the countryside: from the cane fields and fishing towns of the East, from Los Haitises, from the central mountains and La Vega. Each busload of people carried the fruits of their labor. The señoras from up and down the block all put on their largest pots to boil and spent the afternoon peeling plantains and bananas.

It's enough to feed five thousand. The street is overflowing with people eating. A silence falls, like fog, like tear gas. There was hunger. The majority hadn't eaten since the morning. A miracle has been performed, and there is avocado left over. Nightfall. The people are trying to find excuses not to leave. Someone has put on one of the old records: "Y es que no es cierto, señor gobierno, que alguna idea, puede estar presa". It's not true, mister government, that you can lock up an idea. The handkerchiefs come out again.

Santos was a leader in the CGT and gave the closing remarks at the wildly popular music festival, "Siete Días Con el Pueblo." Seven Days with the People. The festival, which was put on by the labor unions in 1974, was a cry for freedom. No, it was more than that. It was an act of open rebellion, being that it fell smack in the middle of los 12 años de Balaguer.

"¡Señor gobierno, abra las rejas!" Open the prison gates, demanded Santos, referring to the song. There were a lot of political prisoners then. There was also a lot of combativeness. There still is – you'll see. It is now completely dark and still the crowd hasn't dispersed. Maybe it's because we are all ghosts on Calle 1ra and we don't want to go back to our quarantine. The señoras on the block have finished washing out their pots. The guy from the colmado sets down another case of rum. Se va la luz. Pitch black -- the electricity has gone out in the whole neighborhood.

In a minute, everything is lit up again with a thousand candles. The tires are lit too, here and on other corners. Santos isn't gone. He has become smoke.

Leer el texto original en español:

LOS NUEVE DÍAS DE FRANCISCO ANTONIO SANTOS: UN HOMENAJE DESDE LA CUARENTENA NEOYORQUINA

cuslar.org/2020/04/24/los-nueve-dias-homenaje/





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“HOMELESS ORGANIZERS IN U.S. SOUND THE ALARM”

By Kristin Colangelo

Homeless organizers across the United States are sounding the alarm as the cold sets in, bringing the nation's attention to the everyday emergency of having no place to call “home for the holidays,” especially during the global pandemic's first winter.

A network of people who are homeless and formerly homeless has recently re-established the National Union of the Homeless (NUH) to bring organization and voice to the largely invisible millions who struggle to secure their human right of housing in the world's wealthiest country.

“I could be homeless today,” said NUH member Patrick Braswell of Rochester, New York. “But if you lose your job or get sick, you could be homeless tomorrow. Now COVID has hit. Those everyday regular people that we used to tell, ‘you're just one paycheck away from homelessness,’ they understand now, because some of them didn't get that paycheck. And they're on the street, being evicted.”

Braswell co-founded the Rochester Homeless Union after suffering a work-related accident and becoming homeless himself. He became connected to the national-level organizing when he found the problems causing homelessness in his city were impossible to tackle alone.

An original NUH organized in the 1980s out of a fundamental economic shift. Computerization, robotization and deindustrialization led to mass layoffs and ultimately family homelessness. This was a new face of homelessness that the country had not seen before. It was a shift from the stereotype of skid row homelessness to displacement of entire families and communities. The current U.S. shelter system was created in reaction to this shift.

Today, continuing automation of the economy had increased homelessness in the United States even before the outbreak of COVID-19. Between 8 and 11 million people were unhoused at the beginning of 2020, including those living on the streets, in shelters or encampments, or doubled up with others.

Record evictions under pandemic

The national eviction moratorium is extended month by month, but no serious

talk of rent cancellation makes mass evictions a real possibility. The Aspen Institute estimates that 30-40 million renters are at risk of eviction in the coming months. Uncertainty reigns as the national moratorium is set to end January 1, 2021.

The pandemic has made painfully clear that homelessness is not the result of individual failings. Rather, it is a symptom of a troubling national trend caused by the lack of living-wage jobs and the defunding of public housing. Housing insecurity is also inseparably tied to other human rights violations faced by the poor, including lack of healthcare, systematic police violence, family separation and rising levels of hunger.

The resurgence of homeless unions across the country is one response to these multiple crises for the 140 million poor and low-income people in the U.S. Joining a homeless union is one way for otherwise disenfranchised people to fight for collective solutions to common grievances. In February, the California Homeless Union won a \$330,000 settlement against the City of Marysville and Yuba County for destruction of personal property when a homeless encampment was dismantled by police.

Fighting for their lives

Across the country, unhoused people struggle against criminalization and are often denied basic civil rights such as voting and identification. These violations have been made worse under the coronavirus pandemic, in which serious public health consequences result from inhumane and unsafe treatment.

As of November 20, 104 unhoused people had died of COVID-19 in New York State, 95 of those in shelters. The official count is most certainly low because of inadequate testing and information, especially during the early wave of the pandemic to hit New York City in March.

The Winter Offensive: Winning hearts and minds

The NUH is active in close to 20 areas across the country and is adding new affiliates every month. In November organizers launched the 2020 “Winter Offensive” to increase the visibility of homelessness during the holiday season and broaden its base of support and collaboration.

With the slogan, “The right to housing, no death in the streets!” the NUH is holding a series of virtual gatherings in December and January focusing on the systemic roots of homelessness and poverty.

“In a time when there is a significant push to commercialize this holiday season, we're fighting to ‘put Christ back in Christmas,’ said Dr. Savina Martin, a national organizer in NUH who was a leader in the original union of the 1980s and '90s. “We're talking about the revolutionary Christ, the man who fed the hungry, healed the sick, cared for the poor and built a love revolution to bring down the oppressive power structure of that day.”

The Winter Offensive highlights the demands of the organized poor for the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness at a time of unprecedented inequality. In a year where over 60 million people in the U.S. have filed for unemployment and tens of millions face eviction, billionaires have seen their fortunes swell by over \$1 trillion.

The union is not calling for charity or a few crumbs from billionaires' Christmas dinners. Homeless organizers around the country are raising their voices to say we need a fundamental reorganization of society to make sure that all are cared for.

“The holiday season is a period of the year when as a civic religious ritual, much of the country gives a certain amount of attention to the poor and homeless,” Martin said. “We contrast the charity messages we hear with the message of Jesus, and the Martin Luther King's Nonviolent Army of the Poor. That is, our message is that it's both possible and necessary to end poverty once and for all.”

Find out more at www.facebook.com/NationalUnionoftheHomeless.

Kristin Colangelo is a formally homeless mother of three. She has organized poor and homeless families for the past 20 years. She is the Organization Secretary and Membership Director and one of the regional organizers of the National Union of the Homeless. She is on the Steering Committee of Put People First! – Pennsylvania and a member of the New Jersey Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

A STATE IN CRISIS: THE PANDEMIC'S EFFECTS ON FLORIDA

By Alex Paredes-Ruiz

“Ever since I got here, I’ve always done what I could to take care of my family,” said Diana Ventura, a Honduran service worker living in Miami after moving in the 1980s. Over the years, Ventura and her brother have regularly sent money back to their family in Honduras by working cleaning and maintenance jobs. The recent job shortage and lack of financial assistance have forced families like the Venturas to cut back on sending money back home.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have hit poor and low-income immigrant families in Florida the hardest. According to the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), 57 percent of Floridians are poor or low-income, with about 64 percent being people of color. In part because of the temporary halt in service and employment last spring, Florida’s economic crisis has further burdened immigrant communities of color by layering on the fear of health risks on top of scarce employment and low wages.

Many wealthy immigrants and Floridians have been to either escape or reduce the effects of COVID-19 in their access to healthcare, testing, and remote work possibilities. For instance, Fisher Island residents, a wealthy enclave with an average \$2.5 million income, purchased thousands of rapid tests from the University of Miami’s health system. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that Latin Americans have the highest uninsured rate of any racial or ethnic group within the United States. While poor and low-income immigrants endured health risks for the sake of testing, wealthier immigrants, like the Fisher Island residents, remained comfortable at home, curtailing any possible risk.

Surpassing a million positive cases in December, Florida has become the third-highest total of COVID-19 cases in the United States after Texas and California. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported Florida’s death rate as 82 deaths per 100,000 people – higher than the national rate of 73. The surge in cases in the latter end of 2020 can be attributed to the reduced enforcement of face masks and social distancing guidelines that were upheld between April and June.

Gubernatorial efforts to address Florida’s economic crisis by reopening the state’s



business have put poor and low-income service workers at risk as they have to choose between their health and an income. However, the attempts to revitalize the economy have failed to address the housing crisis emerging in tandem with the state’s economic crisis. According to Monica Vignes-Pitan, the statewide Florida Online Intake system has reported a 238 percent increase in housing cases between September and November, highlighting an increase in panic and fear over eviction. Florida legal aid agencies predict that the surge in the case will not happen until moratoriums on rent and evictions end and poor and low-income Floridians are no longer given that grace.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted the state’s service and tourist economy alongside the labor market. The first statewide restrictions and lockdowns prevented immigrant workers from working in their typical service jobs as hours were cut and workers were furloughed. Although the state and federal government supplied assistance through unemployment checks and the CARES Act, these funds provided a short-term solution to Florida’s broader issues of high costs of living and low-paying wages.

The halt on business and economic activity hit Miami’s immigrant workers particularly hard. These workers depend on the city’s service economy to support themselves and their families. Service jobs,

such as cleaning, constructing, or gardening, have become scarce as households fear the virus and have canceled or postponed them. These service jobs became a survival mode as immigrant workers attempted to navigate the city’s high expenses during the economic crisis statewide.

Furthermore, state and federal economic assistance programs have excluded undocumented immigrants in their distribution, forcing them to risk their health and safety in hopes of holding on to a paycheck. According to the American Immigration Council, undocumented immigrants make up about 18 percent of the immigrant population and 4 percent of the state population. Vitoria Behar-Zusman, professor and associate dean of research in the School of Nursing and Health Studies at the University of Miami, has said how many undocumented people have massive fear regarding the virus, especially with seeking care and testing. “So, for people who are in the margins, socially, economically, and legally, obviously there is a huge amount of stress,” said Behar-Zusman.

According to the Havana Consulting Group (HCG), the spread of COVID-19 has created a ripple effect in Latin America’s economies. Remittances are expected to drop 21 percent from \$98 billion in 2019 to \$77 billion in 2020. The inability for immigrants to send money back is tied to the decrease in Miami’s tourism and service, as noted by Visit Florida’s report of a 32 per-

cent drop in the third quarter, only slightly better than an abysmal 60.5 percent drop in the second quarter. New financial concerns force workers to shift priorities and stay afloat with the limited benefits and resources they might have, if they qualify, unlike undocumented immigrants who cannot resource any such assistance.

Economies in Latin America and the Global South reliant on remittances will be the most susceptible to the pandemic's harmful economic effects. Remittances account for nearly 20 percent of El Salvador and Honduras' gross domestic product and 30 percent in Haiti. There is a growing concern in immigrant communities as they scramble to find what funds they will send

back to their families abroad to fear how their families will survive. The plunge in remittances will also affect Latin American countries enforcing strict guidelines in face masks and social distancing because of the inability to do manual and service labor.

Alongside Latin American immigrants, poor and low-income white communities have similarly been affected by the pandemic. With an estimated poor and low-income rate of 41 percent by IPS, whites have also been unable to sustain employment during the pandemic. This demonstrates the lack of financial support by state and federal governments for all of its poor and low-income white communities. Florida's passing of Amendment 2 calling for a raise

in the state's minimum wage from \$8.46 per hour to \$15 highlights how many Floridians are desperate to increase wages to support their cost of living. Uniting under a common cause and pressuring local and state officials to address the state's economic and employment crisis can push legislation that addresses the multifaceted issues related to class and race in Florida.

Alexander "Alex" Paredes-Ruiz is a fourth-year student originally from Miami, Florida studying Theatre Arts Management and History at Ithaca College.

IN ABSENCE OF A GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE, STUDENTS STEP UP TO CONNECT IMMIGRANTS TO MEDICAL CARE

By AC Fernández

In light of the failure of federal and local governments during the pandemic, students across the country have stepped up to make sure COVID-vulnerable immigrants can access medical care.

Three-quarters of undocumented immigrants in the United States work in jobs deemed "essential" by the government during the coronavirus pandemic. These estimated 5 million people work on farms, in factories and service jobs, feed the nation's families, and more broadly, keep the U.S. economy running during the worst public health crisis in modern memory. What's more, according to a report by the Center for American Progress, 225,000 serve as doctors, nurses, and home health aides, while 190,000 work in custodial or administrative positions in health care centers, at the front lines of the pandemic response.

All "essential workers" are currently putting their own health on the line to provide for their families, but undocumented immigrants are by far the most vulnerable populations in this labor force. Without valid immigration status, this vital swath of the American workforce is systematically barred from accessing formal health insurance. These workers often are denied or disincentivized from taking sick days if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

"I cannot stay home, COVID or no COVID," an immigrant named José told the Quetzales de Salud team during the pandemic's first wave. He feared not being

able to support his three young children. What's more, undocumented families tend to have high levels of co-residence with extended family relatives and unrelated adults. These complex living arrangements increase the risk for transmission of COVID-19.

In addition to structural barriers to care, like ineligibility for formal health insurance, many experience language and cultural barriers that make healthcare less accessible. As a result, the Office of Minority Health reports that many undocumented immigrants suffer from untreated conditions like hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes. All of these have been identified to increase the risk of severe disease in COVID-19 patients. According to a 2020 age-controlled study by Bassett, et al., Latinos are not only more likely to contract COVID-19, but they have also died from COVID-19 at 2.6 times the rate of non-Hispanic whites, even though the white population is 3-4 times greater.

As a result of these significant disparities that make Latinos — and undocumented families in particular — vulnerable to contracting COVID-19, a group of medical students at Harvard University launched an initiative called ContraCOVID, designed to help migrants access health information and social services in their communities during the pandemic. ContraCOVID's main undertaking, Quetzales de Salud, provides weekly case management services for undocumented families in New Jersey and Florida. The team has now expanded to 20 bilingual volunteers and counting. Volun-

teers make weekly calls and refer families to nearby health centers where they can receive low-cost care and COVID-19 testing.

Silvia Huerta, co-founder of Quetzales de Salud along with fellow Harvard medical students Lianet Vazquez and Brendan Eappen, is a third-year medical student at the Harvard/MIT dual degree program. She describes the first weeks of the pandemic as a call to action. Huerta was already volunteering with Cosecha, a national immigrant advocacy organization, when they held an informational phone call for their community members in March: "There were 20 people on that call, and I would say that 80 percent of those people had either symptoms of COVID or family who had COVID. It was just shocking how many people were affected by this. I remember thinking after that call, somebody needs to do something. Nobody knew where to go."

Huerta and Vazquez shortly teamed up to provide a clinical referral campaign that has since developed into Quetzales de Salud. I subsequently joined the team in May as a bilingual call volunteer after being connected to Vazquez through the medical school admissions process, and now serve as a supervisor for the growing number of bilingual volunteers who reach out to families every week.

Some Quetzales de Salud volunteer members are undocumented themselves. Bilingual volunteers on the call team hail from all over the United States—including Cal-



ifornia, Florida, Massachusetts, and New York--and come from Central American, South American and Caribbean ancestry. Non-Spanish speakers also play a pivotal role in Quetzales de Salud's operations, coordinating an extensive resource database to which community members are referred.

The team also helps coordinate food deliveries and pharmaceutical prescriptions in collaboration with Cosecha, sometimes going so far as to pay for the community's food and medicine themselves.

Many of these volunteers are also medical students who find time for shifts during their busy schedules and follow up each week with their assigned contacts in order to track each family's progress. As of July, Quetzales de Salud had successfully reached 147 undocumented community members across New Jersey and Florida. And as of this writing, the volunteers had completed over 1,000 calls. Huerta thinks volunteers are galvanized by the mistreatment of im-

migrants, saying, "A big part of it for me has been opening people's eyes to the struggles of this community that have predated COVID. I think the volunteers really get it. They see the injustices. Seeing that these people are human just like you, pushes our volunteers to be advocates for change."

In New Jersey, where Quetzales de Salud first launched its COVID-19 clinical referral campaign, Hispanics make up only 19 percent of the population but represent 30.3 percent of COVID-19 cases, according to Cliff Despres in Salud America.

While the health disparities experienced by this population puts them at higher risk for COVID-19 contraction, the pandemic has also led to disproportionate secondary challenges. Although Quetzales de Salud is helping to connect undocumented workers to doctors and testing sites, many of these community members list food insecurity and inability to pay for prescriptions as their greatest concerns — even more

so than fear of contracting COVID-19. These "secondary effects" of the COVID-19 pandemic drive many sick, symptomatic workers into the public in order to ensure they can feed themselves. Were they not to work, they would risk not being able to survive. Many of them, therefore, make the impossible calculation to go to work despite the risk of infecting others, further exacerbating an already dire national crisis.

"I have nothing to eat," Mario told Quetzales de Salud volunteers. This asylee, identified here with a pseudonym, arrived in the United States from Mexico days before immigration officials suspended asylum cases. His case is pending indefinitely. Limited by an ankle monitor, he has been unable to work and without income for months. Quetzales de Salud and Cosecha strive to address food insecurity in addition to the clinical referrals and make food deliveries whenever possible, but the nutrition arm of the project is still in its developing stages.

They also launched a mental health initiative in November. In the absence of a federal response to the coronavirus pandemic, the United States has seen the most cases and deaths per capita of any country in the world. While the Trump Administration claims that "we are rounding the curve" on the pandemic, many states are seeing their hospitals reach near full capacity as COVID-19 cases skyrocket. As a result, grassroots organizers, youth advocates, and community coalitions have been forced to lead the charge to protect groups most at-risk for contracting COVID-19.

Quetzales de Salud has exemplified the tenacity of young people across the country in protecting the most vulnerable to contracting COVID, but Huerta hopes that immigrant advocacy won't stop after the pandemic: "I have always hoped that [Quetzales de Salud] would outlive the pandemic. The goal is to connect people to care that goes beyond COVID-related advice. I hope it helps people understand that healthcare is a human right."

AC Fernández graduated from Cornell University in 2017 and is now a first-year medical student at the University of California, San Francisco. She serves as a bilingual volunteer supervisor for the Quetzales de Salud. To make a contribution to Quetzales de Salud and learn more about its immigrant advocacy operations, please visit <https://gf.me/u/y9zmpd>.



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RECOMMENDED VIEWING

"THE WAR ON CUBA" DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES

On December 11, CUSLAR hosted an online screening of the three parts of the new documentary series, "The War On Cuba," which premiered in September. The media collective Belly of the Beast provides an accessible video reporting style for English-speaking audiences. "It's an outlet that tells the untold stories of the Cuban people," according to the film's impact producer Luna Olavarria-Gallegos. The film focuses on the adverse effects of the U.S. trade embargo on the island in place since 1960.

At the event, billed as a LASP-CUSLAR Public Issues Forum with the Cornell University Latin American Studies Program, director Reed Lindsay spoke to the online audience from his Havana office. He said that an alternative to state-run media and Miami-based propaganda is essential for news in and about Cuba today.

In the past three years on the island, the introduction of cell phone data has made internet use widespread. Internet users, mostly young people, are susceptible to fake or skewed news reporting shared on mobile apps whose sources are obscured. Now that many more Cubans on the island have internet access, "the Miami propaganda machine has gotten out of control," Lindsay said. "The government media can't compete or counter it."

Episode 3 of "The War On Cuba" highlights the island nation's handling of

the coronavirus pandemic. Lindsay noted that even though Cuba has the oldest population in Latin America and an "affectionate" culture, the country has done an outstanding job containing and treating the virus. "Everyone who gets COVID in Cuba goes to the hospital and gets 24-hour care," Lindsay said. "The economy is in shambles, but healthcare is still a priority."

In addition to fighting the coronavirus at home, 30,000 Cuban medical personnel are deployed in dozens of other countries to combat the spread of the virus. Cuba's medical brigades used to be sent to countries in need free of charge, but now wealthier countries contract with the Cuban government for the services that in turn support the Cuban economy.

Olavarria-Gallegos, a 2015 CUSLAR alumna, was part of the Havana-based production team for the film. In a statement recorded for the December 11 event, she said she was pleased to have a role in bringing this educational piece to English-speaking audiences and especially to CUSLAR.

Further, she explained her passion for this particular project: "This is really important to me as someone who was born in the U.S. As citizens, through our taxes and through our support of leaders we vote into office, we support a 60-year blockade on the Cuban people," said Olavarria-Gallegos. For me, it's really important to understand the effects of U.S. policy on everyday Cubans."

DOCUMENTARY FILMS HIGHLIGHT STRUGGLE AND INSIGHT OF UNHOUSED PEOPLE

Takeover (1991)

A classic 60-minute documentary that has clear and critical lessons for the struggles of today. On May 1st, 1990, homeless people in eight cities around the country seized empty (HUD) federal housing simultaneously. It was the first national coordinated homeless housing takeover ever. Skylight Pictures followed the takeovers with 12 crews in the eight cities, documenting the secret planning, the illegal occupations, and the hopeful aftermath of this bold endeavor. An official selection of the Sundance Film Festival, broadcast on PBS on the P.O.V. series. Available here: vimeo.com/42778583.

The Road We're On (2020)

This new 11-minute documentary film follows Patrick Braswell, lead organizer at the Rochester (NY) Homeless Union. The film breaks down stereotypes about who is unhoused and why. It is evidence to the truth of the slogan, "Homeless, not helpless!" as unhoused people step up to find solutions in their own lives and struggle for collective solutions to homelessness and poverty. The film was shot and edited in November 2020 by Band Room Productions and is a collaboration between the New York State Poor People's Campaign and the Rochester Homeless Union. Available here: vimeo.com/484844748.