Nomad Stories: Travelling in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

Travel has been one of the sectors most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries have taken urgent and aggressive action to contain the spread of the virus by implementing measures such as travel bans, border closures, and lockdowns. This thesis theorizes the relationship between self-making, ethics, and travel at a time when movement has become restricted and morally questionable. It traces important ethical tensions generated by the pandemic and grounds them in different conceptualizations of uncertainty, risk, responsibility, and mobility.

Through the examination of the historical and global forces that led to the globalization of movement, capital, bodies, and viruses, this work explores the new parameters of travel as produced by the pandemic and its ensuing restrictions. It argues that COVID-19 blurs the distinctions between local and global infrastructures, bodies, and forms of knowledge, rendering them increasingly difficult to maintain. By examining the unfolding of the global crisis and its effects on the practice of travel, this thesis unravels new and innovative patterns of consumption and envisions alternative futures for the tourism industry.

Preface

The concept of derailment is central to the discipline of anthropology. It encourages research to be open by inviting the discovery of unanticipated avenues of thinking and possibilities of being (Rees, 2018). By attending to the unpredictability, multiplicity, and incommensurability that animate people's realities, the concept of derailment allows for the emergence of different orientations and reorientations of thought.

This work is the written culmination of a series of unexpected events. It wraps together the ethnographic accounts of several individuals whose travel plans were derailed by the pandemic. These stories are as much material and political-economic as they are personal and ethical. At the risk of sounding superfluous or perhaps even naïve, I iterate that this work promotes the founding principle of anthropology of analyzing rather than evaluating and of understanding rather than judging (Brown et al., 2017). It is informed by an anthropology of the actual that is attuned to changes, mutations, and becomings.

Given that the global crisis caused by COVID-19 has not yet been solved, some of the issues addressed here are also left unresolved. A certain element of unfinishedness is thus present in my ethnographic storytelling (Biehl & Locke, 2017). Immersed in scenes of the everyday life, this thesis depicts the emerging political, economic, and social sensibilities produced by the pandemic. By focusing on particular ways of relating to things in motion rather than on how things really are, I argue that the global crisis breaks open new spaces of possibility (Rees, 2018) and transports us into an emerging phase of the travel industry that has not yet stabilized.

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I am forever indebted to my parents for giving me the opportunities and experiences that have made me who I am. They continuously fuelled my intellectual curiosity and selflessly encouraged me to explore new directions in life. This journey would not have been possible if not for them, and I dedicate this milestone to them.

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Above all, I am incredibly grateful to the strangers who took the time and interest to contribute to this research. Their generous sharing of stories, passions, dilemmas, and sorrows made this project possible.

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Introduction

This is not the essay it was meant to be
But it is the essay that it is now.

- Translated from the memories of what was

Manche d'Épée, Gaspésie **May 30th, 2021**

Sitting on a piece of driftwood, on a little patch of beach on the east coast of Canada, I stare at the still life painting in front of me. I squint my eyes, trying to discern the line where the sky meets the sea. As I gaze out into the horizon, absentmindedly, I begin noticing the movement of the water. Like a tranquil dance, the sunlight twinkles on the surface of the ocean, revealing its different tones of navy, cerulean, sapphire, and indigo. I let myself bathe in the blues that surround me, uninterested in keeping track of time. My breath syncs to the gentle rhythm of the waves. This landscape is far from being still.

What a year, I think to myself, *and that's an understatement*. This three-week road trip from Montréal to Gaspésie marks my first travel experience since the beginning of the pandemic. Longing for a change of pace and environment, I had been toying with the idea of travelling for some time. The coronavirus outbreak kept me grounded for over a year, and my feet were turning itchy – I was growing restless. Perhaps a part of me was holding back, awaiting official permission to leave. When the province of Québec lifted its travel restrictions in early May 2020, I decided to pack my bag and drive as far as I could. So, here I am, writing the introduction to this thesis from a pebbly beach over 1,000 kilometres away from home.

By now, the water has almost entirely swallowed the sun, and a soft feeling of nostalgia composes over me. Lulled by the sound of the waves, my mind drifts down memory lane, to the last time I had seen the ocean glow with such warm colours. I reminisce about the year I spent

backpacking across Oceania. Travel has not always occupied the same amount of space in my life. For most of my childhood, it merely characterized a means to an end; I *needed* to travel abroad in order to visit my grandfather and other relatives. As I grew in age and independence, however, my interest in this activity grew too. Soon enough, I began travelling around the world because I *wanted* to. Sometimes in the company of friends, other times of solely my own.

When I first started designing this project, it seemed almost evident that I would take on travel as my object of study. Having myself engaged with the practice in various ways in the past, I felt compelled to complement my personal outlook on travel with an academic one. My curiosity developed particularly around the idea of finding oneself through travel. This discourse appealed to me as a researcher, and possibly as a young adult as well. Whenever I felt trapped in the mundane, worried that I had diluted myself in compromises, travel helped me recentre. I embraced the absence of routine that these journeys offered. I enjoyed the time frame free of common obligations and responsibilities (Richards & Wilson, 2004). The more I travelled, the more my attraction for a nomadic lifestyle amplified. Eventually, I acquired a taste for the everyday of those who made travel an end in itself. My desire with this project was to learn from those who had 'found themselves.' Like them, I wanted to find my place in the world and commit to a way of living. Looking at travellers' modes of fashioning the 'self' provided an interesting avenue for the study of subjectivity. However, this research developed in a vastly different direction than the one I envisioned.

In late December 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia took place in a wet market in Wuhan, Hubei, China (Wu et al., 2020). The pathogen involved in this epidemic was later identified as a novel coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). In the following months, thousands of people in China were infected by the disease. This virus quickly spread across the world (Sahin,

et al., 2020). On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. Characterizing this virus as a worldwide threat called for countries to take urgent and aggressive action (WHO, 2020b). As this novel situation aggravated rapidly, most countries implemented measures such as travel bans, border closures and lockdowns to contain and maintain the spread of the virus (Hurley, 2020).

These new restrictions rendered my field research impossible. Public health messaging strongly advised individuals abroad to return to their home countries and refrain from travelling. My project thus evolved into a remote ethnography. Nonetheless, in the midst of this crisis, some individuals sought to take advantage of the steeply discounted airfares and the atypical absence of tourists as an opportunity to travel (Young & McMahon, 2020). Many were already travelling when restrictions were put into place and decided to remain abroad rather than return home. With the implemented measures limiting mobility, border closures, and cancelled flights, numerous individuals preferred to remain abroad than to struggle to return home. These attitudes toward travelling during a pandemic make for an interesting anthropological object of study. They bring into question the matter of ethics and illustrate how different conceptualizations of mobility create important frictions.

My formal research question thus became: How does the context of the pandemic reconceptualize how we understand travel? I investigate how social agents articulate and negotiate moral claims in a particular temporal ethnographic context of a global public health crisis. This is a thesis rooted in the anthropology of personhood and everyday ethics. My aim is to uncover *why* some individuals felt it necessary to continue travelling despite the challenging conditions. This new research avenue pushed me to retheorize the relationship between self-making, ethics, and travel at a time when these types of activities have become morally questionable.

According to anthropologist Webb Keane, part of the mandate of anthropology is to encounter people in the midst of things (Lambek, 2010). This research engages with the COVID-19 pandemic and seeks to bring to light aspects of living in a crisis from the traveller's point of view. A crisis is typically conceived as a situation in which established routines, traditions, customs, and norms are suddenly disrupted (Schwarz et al., 2016). It defines the loss of stability and the inability to control the exterior forces influencing individuals' possibilities and choices (Vigh, 2008). Referring to an event delineated by a beginning and an end, a crisis can also be understood as a call to action, as a performative act (Roitman, 2013). By drawing on this unique context of crisis, this research aims to present what will hopefully represent a modest but meaningful contribution to our understanding of contemporary travel. A better grasp of how travellers construct themselves as ethical subjects and navigate the resulting tensions can translate into more effective tourism policy management. By tracing the motivations and justifications for travelling amid a crisis, this thesis highlights important elements on which policymakers can focus to achieve their goals. It can also reveal the role governments have in limiting mobility in the context of a pandemic.

Perhaps the best way to introduce what this work is about is by delineating what it is not. For instance, it is not about places, even though it depicts several. Although the narratives shared in this thesis are situated across various places, this project does not focus on them from a solely geographical understanding. Instead, this work refers to the notion of place as "the union of a symbolic meaning with a delimited block of the earth's surface" (Ingold, 2011, p. 192). By expanding our understanding of place beyond mere geography, this thesis looks at how travellers transform places into spaces through narratives that give meaning to their movements (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Any movement opens new possibilities and boundaries that denote the status of traveller. The individuals presented in the following pages volunteered for this project because of a shared passion: travel. They felt strongly about the topic and expressed a desire to articulate their perspectives on the matter. When the pandemic began, many existing mobility inequalities were revealed quite sharply. In most parts of the world, the global crisis was met with strict restrictions on movement. Solely travel deemed 'essential' was allowed during the first and second waves of COVID-19 infections. The term 'essential' englobed professional travel, necessary travel, and walks or physical activity in the open air. Essential travel became a much-coveted label that sometimes overlooked existentially more important matters (Salazar, 2021). With mobility becoming strictly restricted, I could not travel for the purpose of this research. Nevertheless, I could almost picture myself alongside my interlocutors as they recounted their travel adventures in great detail.

The following work uses mobility as an analytical instrument to unfold the diversity of social imaginaries underpinning people's choice to travel elsewhere, revealing the importance of movement as a key social process of our times (Salazar, 2018). Drawing on the ideas of anthropologist Noel Salazar, this thesis considers travel as a building block of self-identity and subjectivity and the entanglement between translocal movement and other forms of symbolic (social or economic) mobility. The following examines how people's sense of self and subjectivity emerge and transform through travel, more specifically in the context of the ongoing global crisis. The pandemic not only exacerbated existing ambiguities in travel but has also generated multiple new ones. By looking at the challenges and difficulties travellers encounter during the pandemic, this work explores how individuals navigate these newly emerged ethical tensions and mitigate risk.

While this project showcases specific challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis in the tourism sector, themes of ethical and moral frictions permeate the entire thesis. Anthropologist Didier Fassin demonstrates in his work that ethics and morality are often confused in everyday life and language and that this confusion has been transferred to discourse in anthropology (Fassin, 2012). Generally, morality is understood as the sociocultural set of norms designating right and wrong, while ethics is often reserved for individual reflection about right and wrong grounded in one's values, principles, and purpose (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013). Given that these terms are used interchangeably in everyday life, describing intellectual landscapes and drawing conceptual lines between ethics and morality in further detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, my aim with this project is to be more attentive to the complexity and subtlety of travellers' reflection and decision-making process, more specifically in the context of the pandemic (Lambek, 2010). The ongoing global crisis has transformed the practice of travel and reframed its moral tropes. At a time where mobility activities have become questionable, it is crucial to examine the tensions between travellers' acts and behaviours in relation to the moral codes imposed on them (Foucault, 1994). A foundational element of agency, the notion of subjectivity needs to be examined when attempting to understand how people act on the world while also being themselves acted upon (Ortner, 2005). Drawing on Dorothy Holland's and Kevin Leander's work, this thesis addresses subjectivity as consisting of individuals' thoughts, sentiments, embodied sensibilities, sense of 'self', and their relations between their 'self' and the world (Holland & Leander, 2004).

According to scholar Michel Foucault, individuals engage in the pursuit of a more ethical life through the intellectual activity of observation, reflection, and interpretation of their 'self.' Caring for the 'self' is understood as an ethical project that transforms oneself and bears a particular relation to others (Foucault, 1989). In fact, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas believes that

the existence of the 'self' is entirely reliant upon its distinction within its relationship with the 'Other' (Levinas, 1989). Present-day anthropology does not view the 'self' as a universal constant but as emerging from the process of socialization. It considers the concept of the 'self' as a historical and cultural artifact that changes over time according to the social terrain in which it is embedded (Cushman, 2019). The discipline of anthropology has come to understand the 'self' as fluid and relational. In a similar line of reasoning, anthropologist Katherine Ewing has argued that people have been observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations in all cultures. According to this scholar, the 'self' is an expression of a symbolic, timeless whole. She suggests that people commonly make shifts among self-representations to adapt to different situations. Despite the existence of numerous self-representations, individuals can feel a sense of continuity as they have the capacity to maintain a contextually appropriate 'self' (Ewing, 1990). This conceptualization is helpful to grasp how travellers fashion their 'self' according to their experiences and socialization. In this thesis, I observe multiple individuals' interactions with the 'Other' and problematize the relationship of opposition between the two. I use the concept of subjectivity as an analytical tool to delve into questions regarding ethics, by exploring what matters most in my interlocutors' lives, as well as how they project their values and emotions into domestic spaces and public life. This project is an examination of the entangled *who*s, *what*s, and *where*s of the coronavirus and travellers. It is a collection of stories about the people, travels, viruses, and questions that constitute our world.

Methodology

Given that long-term ethnographic research in the field has become extremely difficult in the current climate, perhaps even ethically contested considering the close contact involved during a period of social distancing, this thesis is informed by several months of multi-sited ethnographic

research rooted in the internet world. I draw on methods proposed by patchwork ethnography to collect, analyze, and present the data gathered for this project (Günel et al., 2020). While attending to how current living and working conditions are profoundly and irrevocably transforming knowledge production, this approach to anthropology promotes research efforts that maintain the long-term commitments, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterize so-called traditional fieldwork (Faubion, 2009; Pigg, 2013). By reconceptualizing the notion of going and travelling to the field, I can construct field sites adapted to the personal, social, political, and economic constraints brought on by the pandemic (Günel et al., 2020). The internet does not represent a 'placeless place'; in fact, it may be used to reinforce identities (Miller & Slater, 2000). Considering how online and offline realms are nearly inseparable, thick descriptions of online interactions on virtual platforms reflect individuals' offline perspectives, values, and opinions as well (Kozinets, 2010). Through thick ethnographic descriptions (Geertz, 1973), it is possible to highlight the multiplicity of aspects coexisting within a single travel experience. For this reason, the ethnographic analysis I have dealt with is influenced by the notion of multilocality (Marcus, 1995) in terms of fieldwork sites and places grounding travel experiences. Since the story of COVID-19 and its impacts on travellers does not take place only in particular sites, but also along the multiple paths that link them, this project is informed by the online and the global.

This thesis wraps together stories gathered through participant observation, serial interviews, discourse analysis, and careful scholarly literature review into an ethnographic style. Over the course of the summer of 2020, I conducted field research in multiple virtual communities on platforms such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Couchsurfing*, and websites offering resources for travellers such as *Lonely Planet*, *National Geographic*, and personal blogs. Having travelled a fair amount in the past, I was already a member of several of these groups, which facilitated my

immersion in the virtual travel community (Markham, 1998). Through participant observation in these virtual spaces, I developed relationships with multiple individuals, accustomed myself to the groups' behavioural and conversational norms, and analyzed public interactions for common themes and discourses (Cherny & Weise, 1996). In a climate of restricted mobility, closed borders, and limited travel means, I gathered the travel stories of eight individuals through online interviews and exchanges (Hine, 2015). These stories were complemented with photographic and film content and personal journals, which offered a visual to the experience of travelling during the pandemic (Pink et al., 2018) and provided a window into how travellers express their selfhood and subjectivity (Harvey, 2011).

Thinking in dialogue with my interlocutors, the following work presents written reflections interwoven on both the individual and societal levels. These narratives do not assume the matter of truth in an abstract, ideal or platonic sense, but rather embrace different kinds of truth and distinct relations to truth (Foucault, 1994). This position acknowledges human finitude and the limits of how we anchor ourselves and our knowledge. The goal is to push beyond these singular case studies and move into the realm of conversation.

The stories that were shared with me – which I am, in turn, sharing here with you – are just that. Stories. They were told to me in confidence and illustrate their authors' experiences, anecdotes, perspectives, and thoughts. I draw on these narratives, not to report on the reality on the ground, but rather as an attempt to deconstruct opposing attitudes towards travel and to highlight their complexities. Rather than reducing these stories to the categories of moral and non-moral, I examine how ethical questions emerge, are debated, and resolved – or left unresolved. These stories are acutely attentive to the way ethical notions are given life in the present context (Das, 2015). I look at scenes of the everyday in terms of the potential, the actual, and the eventual,

with particular attention to the ethical sensibilities that permeate them. By tracing moral vocabularies and observing how specific actions become qualified as right or wrong, I try and explain the emergence of these conflicting perspectives.

Chapters

This thesis presents a collection of stories about travelling during a global lockdown. The following chapters are structured around the experiences of three of my interlocutors and demonstrate how the pandemic increasingly blurs the distinctions between local and global infrastructures, bodies, spaces, and realities. Although this work is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork that utilizes mixed qualitative research methods, it focuses on the narratives of three particular individuals, in reference to the format of a travel journal. The following ethnographic portraits are rich, nuanced, and complex, and the voices of other travellers are echoed all throughout them.

In the first chapter, I explore the new actualities of travel produced by the pandemic and its ensuing restrictions. To illustrate how the circumstances surrounding this uniquely historical moment have disrupted the practice of travel, I present a few anecdotes from Boris' journey to the Balkans during the summer of 2020. These stories highlight a distinct set of ethical dilemmas generated by the pandemic. When health organizations pinned the global spread of the virus onto mobility, the restrictive measures put into place transformed travel into a morally disputable activity which led to an upsurge of travel shaming. This chapter traces these ethical tensions and argues that they are grounded in different conceptualizations of uncertainty, risk, and moral responsibility.

The second chapter aims to illustrate the complex path along which morality matures and comes to be, and I further analyze the ethical refrains surrounding travel at the present time. By looking at Zoe's experience of the pandemic, I observe how the meanings that she ascribes to her mobility underpin her comportment. By subjecting her options to her own self-evaluative and self-interpretative processes, I argue that Zoe makes decisions which she perceives as ethical. The pandemic has rendered the distinction between essential and existential mobility more visible, and Zoe's travel stories illustrate how the disconnection between these concepts triggers different ethical reflections. The introduction of measures for contagion prevention has redefined the symbolic dimension of private and public spaces, making the ostensibly intimate operations of home life a public concern and driving public concerns into the intimate life at home. By offering a space for conversation, this chapter aims to refine our questions about the moral parameters of space and travel rather than stand above them.

The third chapter problematizes travel and looks at how the pandemic has exacerbated several pre-existing ethical issues with the practice, such as environmental degradation and tourist over-saturation. I argue that the crisis, as a snapshot moment, offers us an opening to remaking tourism. As tourism has arrived at a crossroads, I analyze the tension between the push to return to our 'normal' old ways and the desire to reinvent our practices through Anshul's narrative. The pandemic has brought significant changes to the practice, such as the suspension of global mass tourism, which offered us a glimpse into different possibilities for the future of travel. This chapter investigates the trends of armchair tourism and translocal tourism as placeholding solutions to the halt on travel. It unravels new and innovative patterns of consumption in the realm of tourism.

This research aims to provide a novel contribution to existing knowledge on travel by providing a prompt understanding of a *real-time* pandemic and understanding what is at stake around the ethical sensibilities which it created in the practice of travel.

Pointing Fingers

Feet on earth.
Knock on wood.
Touch stone.
Good luck to all.

- Edward Abbey, author of *Desert Solitaire*

The Shape of Things

Whether it be individuals voluntarily and "recklessly defying the government's strict advice" (Young & McMahon, 2020) or individuals refusing to abandon their prearranged travels, many have been ignoring official travel guidelines and restrictions. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan in Hubei province, China, and its subsequent global spread, mass trade and travel have been cast as the main actors responsible for the pandemic (Sahin et al., 2020). Global health recommendations directed the closure of non-essential businesses, prohibited social gatherings, and required everyone to stay at home with few exceptions. The rationale behind countries' varying degrees of lockdown is made clear with the motto "stay home, stay safe, save lives" (Sahin et al., 2020). By holding 'mobility' accountable for its role in this global crisis, the attempt to restrain most, if not all, of its forms represents an attempt to contain the virus itself (Hurley, 2020). Thus, foreign trade and travel have become heavily restricted, if not even banned in their totality in certain countries. Leisure travel, more specifically, has been placed back in the list of priorities and individual freedoms. These political decisions are not always well-received by all, especially in the realm of travel.

This chapter examines the ethical tensions and contradictions that arise from travel in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. It introduces Boris and presents a few short anecdotes from his travel experiences during the summer of 2020. Through their writing, I notice how the circumstances surrounding this uniquely historical moment destabilize the practice of travel, and

I uncover important debates apropos the notions of uncertainty, risk, and moral responsibility. While some individuals defend a position of individual freedom of movement and choose to keep travelling, others uphold the virtue of social responsibility by asking everyone to consider each other and demand a pause in global movement. In this section, I aim to understand what is at stake around these ethical issues in both the public spheres and the private lives of individuals. I look at how different perceptions of risk inform notions of morality and bring into question the matter of responsibility.

Boris

When I first met Boris, he was completing his government-mandated post-travel quarantine in his little flat in Leiden, in the Netherlands. We connected over the internet after I shared a piece of my research in a travel group on *Facebook,* to which he responded. Having been deprived of socialization for almost two weeks, Boris looked forward to some interaction, even of the virtual kind. He admitted having taken a few liberties during his quarantine. While most of the city was still sound asleep on early mornings, he would go cycling or running in the open air. Stressing the importance of fresh air and physical activity for an individual's mental health, Boris acknowledged that his actions posed a minimal risk of transmission to the public. But confined to his apartment for a few more days, I could only imagine what his state of mind must have been.

Boris has been a senior purser at a large airline company for over thirty years now. His position as an inflight manager on intercontinental flights significantly facilitates his travels. Yearning for adventure myself, I indulged in Boris' pandemic travel stories with profound enthusiasm and perhaps a hint of misplaced envy. Over the summer, Boris journeyed in the Balkans with his partner, Sofia, for six and a half weeks. She is young and adventurous, and like

Boris, she aches to travel the globe. She wished to visit the remaining few Eastern European countries she had not yet set foot in to cross the continent off her list. For members of the *Every Passport Stamp* group, such as Boris and Sofia, travelling to every country in the world is a common goal. This *Facebook* group acts as a virtual platform and community where individuals can ask questions regarding travel, share advice with each other, and offer suggestions based on personal experiences. It is composed of fellow travellers on the quest to visit all the world's countries – or the 193 United Nations-recognized ones. In his early fifties, Boris is one of the few to have achieved this feat. In this group, every personal milestone is celebrated among all. Sofia was going to 'finish' Europe this summer.

This impromptu adventure to Eastern Europe was not what the couple had initially planned for 2020. Due to the ongoing situation's ever-changing nature, they faced numerous challenges with air transportation and border closures. Several of their original spring travels – some planned, some improvised – to Saudi Arabia, the Maldives, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates were cancelled at the last minute. During one of our conversations, Boris told me that while he was on his flight to Bahrain to meet Sofia, the country decided to close its borders to anyone arriving from Europe. He had not even landed when authorities had already arranged for him to fly back. Sofia, who had entered Bahrain earlier, was waiting for Boris to join her. When she heard about the country's border closure, she chose to book a ticket on the same day to return to America. This gave them an afternoon to spend together, at the airport, while waiting to depart separately. Faced with several failed attempts at seeing each other and new restrictions surrounding mobility, Boris and Sofia were becoming restless. They could not wait to see each other and travel together again.

In mid-June, when countries in Europe began alleviating their measures and lifting travel restrictions, Boris and his partner began their trip to the Balkans. At the time, the only controls for

border crossings consisted of self-completed forms in which travellers had to indicate their city of departure and destination, and to declare not having been in contact with individuals infected with COVID-19 or manifesting any of the symptoms related to the virus.

So, the couple was finally able to meet in Bulgaria, where they spent three weeks visiting monasteries, beaches, museums, and other sites. It was surprisingly empty. Public spaces and establishments were deserted. After several days of not meeting anyone and having the sites all to themselves, the couple had to remind each other of the global crisis that was taking place. "We almost forgot! Because if you don't see anyone, you can just forget" (Boris, 2020). Boris felt a little saddened by this since one of the elements he appreciates most of travel is interacting with locals and fellow travellers. He deeply enjoys talking to those that he meets along the way. However, this experience also had its perks. The couple took advantage of the absence of people to visit certain sites that would typically have been flooded with tourists.

> We were sharing pictures with friends on *Facebook*, and people who had been there a year or two before couldn't believe it! They said, "but the streets are empty!" I said, "yeah, the streets are empty" (Boris, 2020).

The couple then spent three and a half weeks in Romania, several days in North Macedonia, and a few more days in Kosovo. I told Boris that I am originally from Romania and that I visit every year or so to see my family. We exchanged a few pleasantries and discussed our favourite places in the country. We started reminiscing. Me, about my childhood, when I was younger, and my parents sent me to spend entire summers at my grandfather's old house. And him, about a time that predated the pandemic. He had already roamed across Romania a few times before. He had

even been prior to the revolution when the country was under communist rule. His partner, however, had never been. This summer was Sofia's first time visiting.

Expressions of Concern

Romania encapsulated a completely different experience from Bulgaria. Categorized as a 'very high' risk level country for COVID-19, most European countries kept their borders closed to Romanian citizens (CDC, 2020). As a result, Romanians spent the summer visiting their own country. People were everywhere, and very few were properly wearing masks. Boris emphasized that he travelled responsibly. He and Sofia rented a car to avoid relying on public transportation, actively sought to visit popular destinations in the early mornings, circumvented crowds, wore masks on the rare occasions where others were around, and sanitized their hands frequently.

Uncertainty

Boris's travel experience to the Balkans presented a myriad of unforeseen challenges attributable to the pandemic. For instance, when Europe opted to open its borders again, the decision was not a universal one. It was difficult to stay informed about which countries were accepting travellers from which countries and which were not. As the situation changes daily, accurate, up-to-date information is hard to find. This factor played a significant part in Boris's decision-making process when it came to selecting destinations. In an obvious way, travel has become an activity no longer focused on where one *wants* to go but on where one *can* go. Certain things as simple as booking a hotel have become complicated. Websites indicate that venues, restaurants, and accommodation are open. They allow and confirm reservations, but one quickly realizes that most are closed when arriving at them. And have been for some time now. Obtaining a reimbursement is an arduous task, whether for a cancelled international flight or a cancelled stay

at a cheap hostel. “We really felt the tension […], you never know what’s going to happen” (Boris, 2020). The challenges that habitually accompany one’s travel experiences have exponentialized in the present circumstances. And the difficulties that Boris and Sofia have encountered over the summer are only a few of the new tensions created by these unprecedented times.

Travelling during a global crisis involves an unavoidable confrontation with scenarios of uncertainty. Whether right around the corner when one arrives at a museum’s closed doors or mid-flight when one is unsure about what may happen after the landing. The virus has exacerbated the challenges that the practice of travel ordinarily poses. The movement towards the uncertain is understood as an essential component of travel in academic literature (Turner, 2011). For many individuals, embracing uncertainty represents part of the attraction, whether it be taking small risks or even facing graver dangers. They venture out into the unknown with promises of infinite possibilities, awaiting to experience serendipity. Yet what once used to compose travel has now come to swallow it whole.

In the context of a pandemic, uncertainty arises before the event even takes place, as “experts cannot predict what it would look like” (Samimian-Darash & Rabinow, 2015, p. 5). When the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern, the origin and the extent of the outbreak of COVID-19 were still being investigated. It was not expected that cases of the virus would emerge outside of China at the time. Nevertheless, after the appearance of COVID-19 cases in Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Singapore, the WHO reinforced its calls for active monitoring and preparedness in other countries (WHO, 2020b).

Because of the virus’s novelty and the lack of knowledge ascribed to it, there was, and still is, much uncertainty about how the future would unfold. The World Health Organization created

a myth-busters web page to address and correct misinformation about the COVID-19 outbreak to manage and control the panic that the current situation has created. The director of this organization addresses the importance of verifying the information displayed by the media (WHO, 2020a). Moreover, this website acts as a real-time information sharing system that enhances public health actors' ability to respond to and understand the social dynamics of the fast-evolving spread of information and misinformation about COVID-19, the outbreak itself, and the control guidelines. It aims to reduce the community panic related to living in this context of uncertainty (Depoux et al., 2020). Global health protocols involve various methods to prevent further contagion and minimize the virus's potential effects. Many governments have introduced these procedures into their legal systems and even criminalized certain behaviours, such as violating a curfew or a self-quarantine period (Blanchfield, 2020).

A large body of academic literature has tackled the topic of uncertainty in the context of crisis. Limor Samimian-Darash's work on biothreats locates uncertainty in the unknown. Rather than seeing it as an object of the future, this anthropologist suggests taking it as a concept that reflects a way of observing and acting on the future (Samimian-Darash, 2011). Drawing on this idea, Caitlin Zaloom further differentiates between possible uncertainty and potential uncertainty. On the one hand, possible uncertainty derives from the gap between the present and the unknown future. It is associated with the knowledge that it can be brought to bear or lack knowledge about the content of any specific possibilities (Samimian-Darash, 2013). Potential uncertainty, on the other hand, comes from the actualities that can emerge from the virtual. It is linked to the intermediate space between what has occurred and what is about to occur. This approach to the concept can help understand the uncertainty involved in biothreats, such as the current situation with the ongoing pandemic. Gilles Deleuze is another scholar to have contributed to this discussion

of the virtual and the actual. Potential uncertainty occupies the space between these two spheres, which Deleuze addresses. According to him, the virtual is not opposed to the real but the actual. "The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 208).

Approaching the COVID-19 pandemic with the idea that the future can be governed (Zaloom, 2006), global health organizations advised that countries implement specific preventative measures and demanded that the international community act quickly to contain the outbreak. The possibility for action was evident even before the development of life-saving antiviral medications and vaccines. Understanding uncertainty through this lens has led governments to develop clinical management, infection prevention and control, surveillance, and risk communication to control the virus. Uncertainty is thus linked not solely to the appearance of new risks in the world but also to attempts at governing them (Zaloom, 2004). And with the appearance of COVID-19, the risks involved in the practice of travel have mushroomed.

With all the difficulties of travelling amid a global crisis, the reduced transportation options, and the borders of many countries still closed, Sofia could not cross all the countries of Europe from her list this summer. During the three weeks that Boris and Sofia spent in Eastern Europe, the borders of Moldova remained closed to anyone and everyone. Although they were flexible with the dates during which they could enter Moldova, the country upheld a strict lockdown for most of the summer of 2020. And so, the couple had to cut their trip short and return home. Boris chuckled, "there was no way of getting into the country. So… one more country to go for her!" (Boris, 2020). While Boris felt reasonably safe and comfortable apropos his travel to the Balkans, others did not.

Risk

Boris's decision to travel during a global crisis has sparked a backlash from several family members and friends. While some condemned his actions with tact and diplomacy, others made their opinions on the matter far less subtle. Mira, Boris's younger sister, is part of the latter group. She confronted Boris head-on regarding his actions, which she qualified as stupid, irresponsible, and unacceptable. Prior to the global outbreak of the coronavirus, there were already several risks attached to the practice of travel. However, with the present circumstances, these have intensified in gravity and exponentialized in number.

A powerful geography of blame has materialized as experts pinned the virus to the realms of largescale trade and travel. The blame for the worldwide spread of the coronavirus was mainly cast on 'mobility'; hence the motto "stay home, stay safe, save lives" (Speed et al., 2020). Risk has to do with the trespassing or the violating of borders, whether physical or ideological. The fact that it can appear on numerous levels may play a role in the world's reaction towards it. In fact, with trade and travel, national borders are viewed as permeable in our current globalized world, and an erupting outbreak seems no further than an airplane flight away. Recognizing 'mobility' as one of the main factors responsible for the virus's global spread, Mira was outraged that her brother, among numerous others, would travel for no legitimate reason during these difficult times. From her perspective, Boris willingly took the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 by pursuing his leisure trip in the Balkans over the summer. It was not only the idea of the risk itself that upset Mira, but also the fact that Boris was knowingly going against international guidelines by taking such a risk.

This disagreement between Boris and his sister, which has yet to be resolved, sheds light on an essential analytical distinction established between 'danger' and 'risk.' These concepts represent the starting point of many academic debates and discussions on the matter of crises. Throughout his work, sociologist Niklas Luhmann renders the distinction between danger and risk visible. According to this scholar, danger is a first-order observation element external to the system, and risk is a second-order observation element generated by the system's decisions (Luhmann, 1993). By pursuing his travel to the Balkans, Boris put himself in a potentially dangerous situation. Had he contracted the coronavirus that was, and currently still is, circulating in high numbers in that region of the world, he would have had to face the physiological repercussions of COVID-19. This danger in wait is a disease threatening the individual body, yet indirectly affecting global systems by making its way through different individuals. By penetrating the body – individual and collective – it alters it, transforms it, and possibly corrupts it. What is frightening today is not solely contamination per se – which has been viewed as inevitable for some time now – as much as "uncontrolled and unstoppable diffusion throughout all the productive nerve centers of our lives" (Esposito, 2011, p. 3). Although it is a spreading danger in itself, the risks surrounding the coronavirus are also extended to different fields and through different representations.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the illness caused by the coronavirus could have been 'severe' for a man in his fifties (CDC, 2021a). Older adults may require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator if they are diagnosed with COVID-19. During an interview, Boris confided that he shared some of his sister's worries. He was not so concerned about the physiological effects of the virus on his body but rather about the lack of access to proper medical care in the eventuality that he fell ill. Considering that he was travelling

to remote areas amid a global crisis, this eventuality was not chimerical. Entangled with other people, things, places, and viruses, Boris had to mitigate different levels of risks throughout his trip. Various governing bodies have conducted risk assessments to determine behaviours that ought to be considered safe and unsafe. These studies' conclusions help inform the 'best practices' on several levels, from the individuals to the larger structural systems. Although there are significant differences between individual risk and population risk measurements, individuals like Boris and his sister also make similar risk assessments based on their decisions, only on a smaller scale.

The appearance of new risks is a topic that has been extensively reviewed by scholars Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Their work focuses on the production and transformation of risk in society and society's attempts to control the future (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999). This approach understands risk in a way in which the future is contingent on the present. It is a conceptual part of the system and inherent to its decision. Risk thus exists not only in the present or in the future but also in a shared temporal space that allows for a simultaneous existence (Samimian-Darash, 2011). In an attempt to mitigate risks and control the COVID-19 pandemic, global health organizations strongly recommended countries to prepare themselves by i) securing sufficient medical material like ventilators, medical oxygen, masks, and other vital equipment; ii) training health workers to follow new protocols to prevent and control infections within clinics and hospitals; iii) implementing measures at airports and border crossings to test people who are sick; iv) supplying laboratories with the necessary equipment to test samples; v) informing the general public about the symptoms and teaching them how to recognize the virus (WHO, 2020b). Most approaches to risk assume an understanding of the notion as a way of "ordering reality, of rendering it into a calculable form" (Dean, 1999, p. 131). The importance attributed to the statistical tracking and mapping of confirmed COVID-19 cases across the world stems from this

common understanding of risk. These frequently updated numbers help inform the strengthening or weakening of the severity of local and global measures aimed at restricting the virus's spread. This approach is predicated on the difficulty of calculating risks and developing a preparedness paradigm (Lakoff, 2008).

The protocols developed by public health units to limit contagion demonstrate an attempt to control the future. The efficacy of these 'best practices' for monitoring and limiting the virus's spread must be situated in relation to the sensibilities and anxieties to which they respond (Caduff, 2015). Global health organizations design specific measures to mitigate specific risks. These protocols address anxieties of worldwide spread and contamination, overwhelmed health care systems, elevated mortality rates, and overstressed economies. These present risks and future corollaries exist in relation to countries' structural decisions. As such, certain countries have been facing different levels and types of risks caused by the pandemic.

An analytical distinction has also been established between objective and subjective risk (Pidgeon et al., 1992). According to some scholars, on the one hand, objective risk refers to phenomena and causality in the world that can have harmful effects. On the other hand, subjective risk acknowledges that beliefs and opinions often deviate from scientific assessments (Stoffle et al., 1991). While an in-depth discussion on this distinction is beyond this text's scope, it is essential to address that risk can be culturally and historically situated (Renn, 1998). In fact, according to Mary Douglas, risk is created within culture. The meanings of risk, their ontological qualities and moral implications are said to be "socially and culturally constructed by means of collectively shared representations" (Boholm, 2003, p. 175). Some risks can be understood as embedded in everyday life practices, while others emerge as abstract, distant calculations. While some risks

refer to concepts that are ‘experience-far’ and beyond the sphere of ordinary experience, others are ‘experience-near’ (Geertz, 1983).

The pandemic has brought to light several of these regional differences in how risk is manifested and understood. Through the global monitoring of the coronavirus spread and contamination, it became noticeable that distinct trends materialized in different areas around the world. Thus, global health organizations need to consider how historical and political contexts have led to the emergence of different types and levels of risks when developing protocols to mitigate them. Similarly, Boris’s own concerns shifted according to the specific problems confronted by the countries he was travelling to. His understanding and attribution of risk depended on the risks attached to the areas he was visiting. While some countries were, and still are, facing risks of augmented mortality rates in their retirement and assisted living facilities, more are dealing with inundated medical care systems, and others are encountering worrisome declines in their population’s mental health. Therefore, the architecture of national and international policies aims to alleviate fears surrounding not only the physiological repercussion of viral contagion but also its broader implications.

Moral Responsibility

For the general population, travel in the current context runs counter to standard public health narratives about this viral disease. Critical analyses show how national health policies, underwritten by global health institutions, work to insulate people from viruses and parasites, animal vectors that transmit them, and even one another (Nading, 2014). Homes and bodies are increasingly isolated as sites of responsible, individualized decisions and behaviours blamed for spreading the coronavirus (Farmer, 2006). It is undoubtedly true that the World Health

Organization's coronavirus control protocols impact the travelling communities. Many, if not most, of the measures implemented to restrain the spread of the virus impact travellers. However, while protocols for controlling the outbreaks of the coronavirus imagine discrete spaces, institutions, and spheres of social action, the reality is that the world is much more fluid than policymakers seem willing to imagine (Nading, 2014). These groups' shared values, glorified 'mobility,' and cherished freedom colour their perception of what global health should mean and how they should participate in it. How things matter to people is realized in how they live their lives, by keeping or breaking commitments and meeting new circumstances with discernment, and sometimes with imagination and risk. Things matter in the way that people interpret their roles and their lives simultaneously, with attentiveness, sheer courage, energy, verve, and splendour (Lambek, 2015, p. 41). And for the more avid travellers, pursuing their trips in the present circumstances does not necessarily infer lesser respect for global health.

Nevertheless, pointing fingers and casting blame on travellers for not respecting the protocols devised by national and international policies oversimplifies the situation. In many cases, travellers' decisions and activities fall well within the realm of legality. They comply with geopolitical decisions like border closures and international flight disruptions, follow global health recommendations like physical or social distancing and wearing masks in public spaces, and respect countries' legal requirements like providing negative COVID-19 tests and quarantining upon return from abroad. These measures are concise, specific, and have strict boundaries, leaving little room for interpretation and debate. Mira's reaction to Boris's travels does not stem from his actions going against the *letter* of the law but rather against the *spirit* of the law. By travelling across Eastern Europe for almost three months, Boris could have participated in contaminating

various groups of people. Even if they remain penetrable, circumnavigating the protocols instigated to limit the spread of COVID-19 defeats their objective.

These conflicting perspectives on travel stem from different understandings of the notion of responsibility. While Mira emphasized the importance of collective responsibility to deter her brother from travelling, Boris referred to his individual responsibility to defend his actions. Even if, according to him, he was personally responsible with his actions and precautions throughout his journey, he did not conform to the notion of social responsibility that currently dictates a voluntary mass halt in travel.

Philosopher Bernard Williams offers a helpful analysis of the notion of responsibility, in which he describes our current understanding of the concept as one where moral blame allegedly attaches itself only to voluntary actions (Williams, 1993). Responsibility manifests itself in scenarios where a situation's outcome can be tied back to our voluntary actions. Friedrich Nietzsche's work defines morality as social habits designed to bind members more firmly into the herd. Morality shifts the 'target' of evaluation from an action's consequences to its intentions (Nietzsche, 1994). With responsibility, self-awareness becomes moralized. Members of a group or a society are trained to be introspective by taking a critical view of their choices. The interpretation of our lives – immediately, prospectively, and retrospectively – is central to the living of them (Lambek, 2015). The institution of morality affects our thinking and practice, but only in specific contexts and only to a certain extent. For the most part, we operate in everyday life with "a different and more complex conception of responsibility" (Lambek, 2010, p. 149).

Boris has reflected abundantly on his decision to travel in the present climate and on its potential repercussions. He has a deep appreciation for moments of self-reflection. Accomplishing

most of his previous travels solo, this wanderer enjoys the opportunity to think about himself — his behaviours, interactions with himself and others, his views of the world. Boris remains confident in navigating the ethical tensions currently enmeshed in the practice of travel as he believes in having acted responsibly throughout the entirety of his trip to Eastern Europe. By deconstructing the various elements of his travel narrative, we can observe how Boris was closely attentive to governing himself as a potential vector of transmission of the coronavirus. During his travels, he acknowledged having based most, if not all, of his choices in consideration of the ongoing pandemic.

An adamant proponent for personal freedom, Boris believes that it is every adult's personal responsibility to think and act morally and responsibly. He typically refrains from telling other people what to do or not to do. As a cosmopolitan, he highly values freedom and wishes it upon others as well. However, Boris recognizes that there have been occurrences in which individuals should not have been travelling. He shared with me the story of a Russian influencer who chartered a helicopter to visit a 'hermit' a few weeks earlier in the summer of 2020. Agafya Lykova is a 76-year-old woman, a Russian icon, living in the Siberian wilderness. She is the last survivor of a family who fled religious persecution by Josef Stalin in 1936 (Stewart, 2020). The travel blogger has sparked public outrage and is accused of flouting safety measures as she flew into the remote forest of Khakassia to visit this woman during a pandemic. The influencer and her pilot now face legal action for their unauthorized jaunt into the Siberian outback. Boris concluded this story by conveying that "this is an example of taking it a step too far" (Boris, 2020). Everyone is free to do what they want, but this would be considered irresponsible behaviour for him.

So, where should the line be drawn?

Scholars suggest that we examine four elements when looking at responsibility: the cause, the intention, the state, and the response. The cause typically refers to the idea that one's actions brought a particular state of affairs. The intention raises the question of whether one wished for that state of affairs. The state addresses the state of mind or condition one was in when they did that action. The response concerns the idea that it is one's business to do something about that state of affairs (Lambek, 2010).

Drawing from Nietzsche, Williams argues that the notion of 'voluntary' is overemphasized in discussions of responsibility (Richardson, 2004). Although we are held responsible only or especially for intentional actions in many circumstances, this is by no means uniformly so. The efficacy, and hence the individual's responsibility, may be extended by the agency of their body, body parts, property, dependents, or works (Williams, 2006). When these parts are intrinsically connected to us or are a part of us, we can also be socially recognized as responsible for them. As such, it is understood that a traveller's body, which must be maintained healthy and free of COVID-19, for instance, is the traveller's own responsibility.

Before departing for the Balkans, Boris's father also exchanged a few words with him. He warned his son that the ongoing situation was severe and that it should be taken as such. He did not agree with travel at a time where it could jeopardize others. This conversion took Boris by complete surprise. Both of his parents are ardent travellers who have embraced a nomadic, adventurous lifestyle. They brought Boris and Mira into a world filled with wonders to explore and discover and carefully cultivated a passion for travel in their children. So Boris did not expect this reaction from his father. Nevertheless, he believes that things are not only black or white. There can also be much gray. He considers that his actions were probably safer than those who remained in their own country and went to a crowded beach for a weekend.

Travel Shaming

The phenomenon of travelling amid the pandemic has elicited strong responses from the global population. The sentiments of anger, disappointment, and exasperation that Mira expressed towards her brother are a mere echo of those expressed by the general public towards travellers. A loud and noticeable number of individuals vehemently attempt to deride others from travelling in the current circumstances. Since official channels have failed to enforce a pause in global movement, travel shaming has emerged as a new form of social responsibility, one where collective action rather than individual choice is becoming the operative productive force.

These attitudes have led to the emergence of 'travel shaming,' a reaction aimed at discouraging people from travelling by casting social shame on those who do. Scholarly work identifies rejection and criticism as common occurrences that lead people to feel ashamed (Fortes & Ferreira, 2014). This negative feeling can be a powerful agent of regulating behaviour. According to the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, shame is a feeling that supposedly arises when one does not meet society's requirements and when this perception influences one's sense of belonging and acceptance (Schopenhauer, 1909). This feeling provides specific parameters that delineate the acceptable behaviours from those that are not within a group. Schopenhauer offers a way of understanding shame as the concept of a self-conscious emotion evoked by self-assessment and reflection. It supports socialization by opposing selfish drives (Richardson, 2004). Travel shaming slightly differs from this conceptualization of shame in the sense that this phenomenon is premised on both the 'self' and others. The shame that one may feel after travelling amid a crisis does not necessarily arise from self-reflection. Instead, others will actively cast shame in both the individual's private and public spheres of life to try and prompt feelings of guilt. Travel shaming

aims to oppose individual rights and convert them into meaningful forms of collective citizenship through public embarrassment and humiliation.

Although it intends to effect transformation, this approach may be less impactful in sustaining meaningful change. Attempts at social media shaming have proven feeble on several occasions. Travel shaming assumes that being mobile in the present circumstances is insensitive, irresponsible, and poses significant risks to the local population. However, not everyone necessarily submits to this viewpoint. When I asked him about his thoughts on the matter, Boris revealed that several of the conversations he had with family members and friends lingered in his thoughts during his travels. He can think for himself about his attachment to the values expressed and respond critically to others' convictions, but he cannot entirely ignore them (Lambek, 2015). However, Boris reminded me that having the capacity and ability to travel in these circumstances is a privilege he valued preciously. With this freedom and privilege comes responsibility, and people should respect the local rules. These ambiguities may shed light on issues that may not be as black or white as some make it seem, but it is essential to remain sensitive and attentive to those around us.

Ruptures

These unprecedented times have generated disconnects between several groups of people. Even within travelling communities, subgroups have become widely polarized. The media tends to portray individuals who travel in the current climate as a single atomic phenomenon when it is not. Are there behavioural similarities that justify creating groups by risk-seeking and mitigating activities? Certainly. However, referring to all individuals exercising their mobility as a homogenous, cohesive entity obscures crucial nuances. As not all travellers share the same goals

and values, similarly, not all sustain the same beliefs on how to best deal with the current situation. Nevertheless, they undergo the ubiquitous public display of reproachful social messages. Even if media slogans make statements about the social salience and the cultural and political environment in which travellers live, they fail to present the clash of alternative values and interpretive practices within these groups.

Platforms hosting virtual travel groups have been shattered. If it were not enough that the practice of travel has become an unmatched ordeal, discussing it has too. Heated debates around whether travel is legal and, more importantly, moral have created large divides within the travel communities. In many online groups such as *Every Passport Stamp*, websites such as *The Lonely Planet*, and regional tourism pages, moderators needed to get involved and restate their membership rules regarding respect and tolerance to cease the bullying taking place on their channels. The censuring of certain posts deemed as 'negative' has reinforced specific mindsets within these groups. Apart from removing a few posts in clear violation of community rules, most moderators refrained from engaging in the ongoing debates on their platforms. This attitude of 'neutrality' has been criticized by many members who reminded the leaders of large virtual communities of their influence upon their captive audience and asked them to shape conversation around the social responsibility of travel during a global crisis. Nevertheless, discussions that may raise ethical considerations or create tensions about the topic of travel during the pandemic seemed to be avoided and deleted by most channels.

For many globe trotters, the seismic shift around the world has forced a reassessment of their lifestyles. What once felt like an adventure now seems like alienation (Bloomberg, 2021). Varying degrees of lockdowns have changed our environment and our appreciation of what is

around us. As many individuals chose to suspend their travels, they expected the same of others. Travel shaming initially emerged in these internal groups before being broadcast on a larger scale.

It has become easy to lose sight of what matters in a plethora of voices confronting us with abstract discourses on morality. According to anthropologist Michael Lambek, our lives are deeply informed by what matters to us, and we live them *as if* things matter. This *as if* becomes a reality, and, consequently, we justify our actions and ways of living because they matter. At some point, we take things for being good in their own right and no longer feel the need to accompany them by justifications (Lambek, 2015). For individuals who absorb travel as part of their identity, practices and activities surrounding travel no longer require justification. Mobility, in multiple forms, grows to occupy an essential role in their way of living. However, events may occur that highlight these actions and lifestyles and demand their revaluation. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of those events that has ruptured our previously established balance and forces us to reassess. As the context has changed, what once used to matter and be good may no longer be. Travel has undergone such treatment. The practice has been placed under the microscope and demands justifications more than ever before. Rather than assume that we already know what is at stake, this work desires to make us more curious about our ethical concerns and practices. It examines the meanings travellers attribute to their movements and traces different justifications for travelling amid a crisis.

Where Are You From?

It's not what you look at that matters,
it's what you see.

- Henry David Thoreau

No Place Like Home

For the past fifteen years, Zoe has been roaming around the globe with no fixed address or destination. With no home to return to. On the road full-time, she describes herself as an urban nomad. When she started working remotely for a marketing firm several years ago, she discovered new freedom to define her lifestyle. And Zoe certainly did not want to define it around work. In 2005, the lease for her little apartment in New York came to an end, and she chose not to renew it. Instead, Zoe packed a suitcase and began travelling around the country, staying with her friends while working from her laptop. What started with a United States map and a few marks pinned onto it has since grown into something much bigger. Visiting every country in the world is a life goal that she also shares – perhaps more loosely than other fellow travellers. At the time of our interview, Zoe had already checked off eighty-nine countries from the United Nation's list of countries. She had plans to reach her hundredth country during the summer of 2020 by making her way through Eastern Europe, but that was before the COVID-19 global crisis disrupted everything.

The following presents Zoe's travel experiences during the pandemic with the hopes of elucidating some of the taboos and shaming that have come to surround the subject of travel in the present time. In this chapter, I observe how the meanings that she ascribes to her mobility come to underpin her comportment. By subjecting herself and her actions to her own self-evaluative and self-interpretative processes, Zoe fashions herself into an ethical individual (Foucault, 2005). Through the writing of her narrative, I examine how she interprets particular ethical dilemmas, justifies her actions and decisions, and attributes praise and blame (Lambek, 2015). This chapter

aims to observe the complex path along which morality matures and comes to be in Zoe's negotiation of the pandemic's uncertain terrain.

Zoe

For many travellers such as Zoe, the concept of mobility is directly coupled with that of quality of life. With the emerging ease of international travel and migration that accompanied the end of the Cold War and the rise of economic globalization in the late twentieth century, more and more people have become mobile (Ma, 2003). Travel, more specifically, has been facilitated by a growing network of accommodation options and tour companies, and a heightened flexibility of life and work patterns (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Although there has always been an element of globality involved in the practice of travel, mobility has undergone profound changes in its reach and scale over the last few decades. The proliferation of the media in the twenty-first century stimulated an increase in virtual, imaginary, and physical mobilities (Grieco & Urry, 2011). Travellers are now significantly more connected and bound in a myriad of global networks and relationships (Meethan et al., 2006). Mobile applications, virtual platforms and groups, and social media represent essential places of interaction and exchange among travellers of all kinds. The advancement of networking and communication technologies has offered individuals possibilities for moving and dwelling in multiple realities at once (Germann Molz, 2012). By being constantly connected, Zoe is always present in the world, physically and virtually.

In August 2020, when I conducted a formal interview with Zoe, she was staying at her friend Louis' apartment in London. As soon as authorities worldwide began alleviating travel restrictions, she left her hometown and flew to the United Kingdom. Zoe had first met Louis a few years earlier when she was visiting the city and needed a place to stay. They were introduced

through *CouchSurfing*, an app that connects travellers with local hosts all around the world. A large community has developed around this platform that provides free accommodation options and social exchanges with like-minded individuals. Having a local host and staying with him in his home had offered Zoe the opportunity to experience London in more profound and meaningful ways. Since then, they have remained good friends, and now, every time she visits London, Louis offers her his apartment.

Zoe's place in the world is in constant movement. Her lifestyle exemplifies what anthropologist Erik Cohen refers to as 'existential travellers' (Cohen, 1979). Rather than being centred in a place of residence, existential travellers create 'home out there' experiences and evolve to negotiate a plurality of homes through their travels (Lew & Wong, 2017). The home is no longer about a unique place but rather an ensemble of places that function as reference points, which for Zoe includes Louis' apartment in London. The notion of home becomes an intangible hybrid one that is perpetually recomposed (Brousse, 2020). Even though the idea of *home* is often tied to a sense of belonging and security to which individuals attach life experiences and personal identities, Zoe understands *places* as being more importantly embedded in a network of identities, relations, and histories (Augé, 1995). By embodying cosmopolitanism as a mode of life, the meanings that she ascribes to her movements can be life-shaping.

World Citizen

The matter of mobility has been the crux of all discussions about COVID-19 since the beginning of the crisis. The coronavirus spread among people by infecting individual mobile bodies. However, as people moved across different geographies, so did the virus and the risks it presented (Daulaire, 2011). To curb the spread of COVID-19, authorities worldwide began

categorizing different forms of movement along the axes of 'essential' and 'non-essential' (Salazar, 2021). From a macro perspective, nearly all governments have utilized the label of 'essential' to limit the free movement of goods and people, and subsequently, that of the virus itself. Overall, the most frequently imposed mobility controls include: (i) a partial or general closing of borders, (ii) a partial or total suspension of flights, (iii) specific travel restrictions that ban the entry for people coming from certain countries or regions, and (iv) different post-arrival measures such as quarantine, self-isolation, or visa requirements (UNWTO, 2020). As the crisis reignited discussions surrounding the essence of free movement, it also posed a potential threat to mobility structures and procedures that had been negotiated and established formerly. Certain states began heavily monitoring essential mobilities in public and private spheres, mainly through different mechanisms of social control and various degrees of technological surveillance and police intervention (Salazar, 2021). In general, essential mobilities have come to encompass very few restricted movements such as (i) professional travel, which mainly concerns individuals whose work require some physical movement, (ii) necessary travel, which includes going shopping for groceries and other necessities, and (iii) daily physical activity, which refers to walks and other types of movement in the open air (allowed with specific restrictions nonetheless) (Speed et al., 2020). From a micro perspective, most individuals were prohibited from engaging in activities that did not conform to these essential categories. As people were told to stay home and safe, it became suspicious to partake in movements labelled as non-essential (Salazar, 2021). Unfortunately for Zoe, although they characterize an *essential* part of her existence, her mobile lifestyle practices were considered non-essential and have thus been restricted and even banned in some countries.

Zoe's situation showcases that understanding what is essential from a macro perspective can differ quite significantly from the meanings ascribed to mobility at the scale of the individual.

As governments made use of their legal power to limit movement, they have done so "sometimes at the cost of existentially more important matters" (Salazar, 2021, p. 7). The distinction between essential and non-essential mobilities is fine and vague. Zoe's lifestyle highlights the need for another critical type of mobility, namely that of existential mobility. The pandemic and the exceptional circumstances that it produced have rendered the dis(connections) between these understandings of mobility much more visible. While some people defend the freedom of movement and deplore the lack of consideration for mental health, others draw on economic arguments and the force of habit to maintain a pre-coronavirus status quo. Zoe's narrative distinctly conveys how her movements are essential to her existence (Cohen, 1979). Her choice of lifestyle represents "an existential cry against immobility" (Silva, 2015, p. 146). Nevertheless, as the pandemic began, authorities worldwide started campaigning for immobility, subsequently transforming the mental health impacts of lockdowns and other public health restrictions into secondary concerns and neglecting the benefits of mobility. The virus came to dictate where we could go and where we no longer could, whom we could meet and whom we no longer could. Questions such as "Where are you from?" and "Where are you going?" acquired new degrees of importance. These typical questions used to represent a standard conversation starter among travellers, yet they have now come to indicate different levels of risk. While being from different places around the world served as common grounds for travellers to come together in a community, it has now come to represent the element that most divides the world.

As Zoe moves in the world, her behaviour has come to suggest deviancy. In the context of the pandemic where the primary public health messaging has been concerned with "stay home, stay safe, save lives" (Sahin, Agaogly, et al., 2020), being far away from home has come to suggest deviant behaviour for not abiding by public health measures (Depoux et al., 2020). The answer

that a traveller provides to the question of "Where are you from?" indicates the level of risk attached to them, which varies depending on their country of origin. Some world regions have been labelled as being of 'higher risk' due to higher COVID-19 infection rates, and individuals from those areas are subsequently perceived as such. In order to manage the globality of the situation, many countries closed their own physical borders to control and contain the coronavirus. Such measures have played a significant role in redefining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion by reaffirming the borders of a place (Augé, 1995) and strengthening ideas of 'us versus them.' This climate of fear of the virus has also catalyzed an increase in xenophobic sentiments and hate crimes, particularly aimed against Asians. Throughout history, viral diseases have often been associated with the places or regions where outbreaks first occurred (Zeng et al., 2020). However, the use of the terms 'Chinese virus' or 'Wuhan virus' may have encouraged racist rhetoric and anti-Asian attacks, which manifested at various degrees worldwide (He et al., 2021).

The new levels of importance attached to a 'place' profoundly transform the concept. With the implementation of physical distancing models, the social representations of cities as complex systems of vast places conceived for social coexistence were reshaped into smaller inter-individual spaces for 'survival' (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021). Public spaces, which previously provided people with the material and immaterial infrastructure needed to carry communal life, have been reconceptualized through the introduction of various restrictions (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021). There was not as much room for people to occupy these spaces anymore, so mobility diminished. Correspondingly, with the reconfiguration of domestic spaces, the home was transformed into the optimal refuge for people's confinement. The notion of territoriality helps understand how these reconceptualizations of various spaces have come to be. This concept highlights that control over space is crucial for life since it grants psychological and physical

protection (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021). Scholars have identified different kinds of territories such as public, domestic, interactional, and bodily territories (Lyman & Scott, 2009), all of which have been approached differently by the authorities governing them in the particular context of the pandemic.

As the notion of home became synonymous with safety, Zoe was caught in limbo. With no permanent address since 2005, there was no home for her to return to. The situation was aggravating quickly, and she was pressed to make her next move. Countries urgently called upon their citizens abroad to return home, reifying the significance of passports. Recognizing that the travel restrictions significantly limited her accommodation options, Zoe had to take refuge in Boulder, Colorado. Since the novel coronavirus affects mainly the immune-compromised and the seniors, she returned to her hometown and chose to care for her elderly parents.

A Cruise to Nowhere

At the beginning of the year 2020, prior to the pandemic, Zoe was in Bangkok. At the time, only certain parts of the world had begun addressing the situation of the coronavirus outbreak. Zoe believes that she contracted the virus in late January during her flight from Bangkok to Taiwan. While the illness experienced from the virus was not too debilitating, she suffered from lung damage that caused her mild breathing difficulties for the four following months. Nonetheless, she recovered from the disease quickly and continued with her travels. After slowly making her way across Southeast Asia, Zoe embarked on a cruise at the end of February. It was her first and, to this day, only multi-day voyage on a boat. Departing from Sydney, Australia, this 23-day cruise promised multiple stops across Oceania. News about the Princess Diamond's outbreak and

subsequent lockdown had already broke, but if the Norwegian cruise line was willing to take the gamble, so was Zoe.

Before embarking, all passengers and crew members had their bodily temperature taken and were asked to fill out a form indicating their past travels. Anyone that had been in South Asia in February was turned around for precaution, leaving mainly Australians, New Zealanders, and Americans on the boat. Zoe herself had barely made the cut. About a week after the ship's departure from Sydney, the outbreak of COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. While Zoe was cruising around the South Pacific, the rest of the world was entering its first lockdown. There was something almost dystopian about the situation Zoe found herself in; while she was still dancing in the theatre with others, the world as we knew it came to an end.

The cruise ship had only made two of its scheduled stops when ports of South Pacific islands decided to close to maritime traffic, leaving the ship stranded at sea without an immediate solution on land. It was turned away from numerous countries, including New Zealand, Fiji, and Hawai'i. When it arrived in Pago Pago, American Samoa, for refuelling, no one was allowed to disembark. Zoe told me that "Samoans were terrified. It was all over the news that this boat was coming in, but the truth is that we didn't want to get off the boat either!" (Zoe, 2020). After two weeks at sea, with no coronavirus case on board, everyone knew that the boat was safe. Coming to this realization shifted ethical discussions and reattributed risk to a different party. The cruise, typically understood as a mobile tourist enclave and space of containment (Weaver, 2005), came to symbolize a floating, isolated island, free of COVID-19. It was no longer the individuals on the boat that were perceived as potential vectors of transmission but rather those on land who risked bringing the virus on board. This situation problematizes the pre-conceived relationship between the 'self' and the 'Other.'

The relationships between tourists and local people are asymmetrical in a variety of ways, as they exist in a world system of differences in which the interdependence of these groups is hierarchical. Examples of the domination of the 'Other' arise from the early colonial times when exploring otherness was motivated by the intent to exploit. Even though the form in which exploitation takes place has changed throughout time, tourism nowadays remains framed within a discourse of power. According to sociologist John Urry, the 'tourist gaze' participates in structuring relationships between the people being visited and the people visiting (Urry, 1990). This notion refers to the idea that the tourism industry produces particular desires and expectations that tourists then place on local populations, which in turn serve to commodify local ways of being and doing. Nevertheless, the ongoing state of emergency has changed the tourist landscape and punctuated a significant decline in hospitality and mobility (Korstanje, 2020).

This particular anecdote of Zoe's travels highlights and unsettles the boundaries between the 'self' and the 'Other,' and demonstrates that the process of creating the 'self' in opposition to an 'Other' always entails violence from repressing or ignoring other forms of difference (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Neither the cruise nor the island had cases of COVID-19 disease locally, yet both feared the 'Other' that carried the potential of contamination. It is essential to remember that "what binds us is a microbe, but it also has the power to separate us" (Markel, 2020).

The Invisible 'Other'

During the global crisis, the spatial dimension in isolation and physical distancing guidelines has become a central measure of protection for both one's own and others' health. By not allowing people to disembark and, similarly, not allowing anyone to embark, the cruise line ensured the least contact and possible contagion among the travellers and the locals. Nevertheless,

many aspects of this exchange, or rather absence of exchange, that was driven by fear evoke symbolic dimensions associated with the social representations of 'others' (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021). Representations of 'otherness' are critical to the concept of identity as they represent the foundations for building a sense of who we are and who we are not. However, they also radically simplify the complexity of life by reducing it to a few basic dichotomies such as *us* and *them* (Salvatore, 2018). The line that separates the 'self' from the 'Other,' the in from the out, and those belonging from those excluded is arbitrary. Understanding the virus as an external element to the 'self' gives it the capacity to engage in the 'othering' of the bodies to which it attaches itself (Beaman & Sikka, 2016). The language used to qualify viruses often contains terms of invasion since they move across borders and travel along with people as they circulate. The concept of immunopolitics suggests that the constitution of the political 'self' is always accompanied by an attack on the 'Other' (Schmitt, 1950). When observing how the pandemic situation has unfolded, the invisible COVID-19 virus was perceived as the racialized 'Other' in all the countries where it landed. It arrived from outside the nation, alongside travellers who were depicted as vectors of transmission that made the community sick. From the perspective of immunopolitics, it is "the duty of those who are part of the 'self' to defend the separation line with everything they have, because the alternative appears to be annihilation" (Rees, 2020).

By associating a person or group of people who share common characteristics such as travellers to COVID-19, stigma and othering create confusion, mistrust, anxiety, and fear, which hamper effective health emergency responses (CDC, 2021b). The anthropology of outbreaks is conclusive: "stigma and 'othering' pose serious health hazards during epidemics […] and lead people to physically distance themselves from perceived sources of transmission" (Ennis-McMillan & Hedges, 2020). However, drawing attention to specific vulnerable groups such as the

elderly or the immune-compromised often leads to a misguided sense of security for individuals who do not identify as being part of these 'risk groups.' Since the beginning of the pandemic, contact tracing has demonstrated that most transmission does not occur through contact with foreigners or strangers but rather within the context of familial or communal gatherings (Liu et al., 2020). 'Othering' the disease as a problem that solely concerns specific groups such as travellers and individuals returning from travel thus misrepresents the most likely vectors of transmission – groups of close friends and family with whom we feel safe.

Blame circulates along with illness, yet those circulations are never straightforward (Nading, 2014). As seen with the travel shaming phenomenon, when positioning travel as one of the foremost perpetrators of the pandemic, those engaging in this activity are held responsible for the situation's amplitude. This reaction most likely stems from a lack of knowledge about how the virus spreads, a need to cast blame, or fears about the disease and death (CDC, 2021b). Throughout different stages of the pandemic, the idea of travel has been emotionally fraught for different reasons. At first, people feared travellers for the risk of contamination they posed, since they could be the ones 'bringing the virus home'. Authorities and policymakers were mainly concerned about the elderly population since they represented the group most at risk of fatality from the disease. Once the virus had spread across most countries around the globe, more and more people realized how interdependent we are and recognized the vulnerability of the 'Other,' referring to both the virus and individuals who have been 'othered' by the virus, as their own. The COVID-19 pandemic slowly turned "the life experience of a subaltern 'Other' into something that matters to us all" (Beverley, 2004). At this time during the crisis, discourses surrounding the ethics of travel shifted to address the risks that the activity posed to local populations. The fear of travellers was no longer about them bringing the virus home but rather them compromising vulnerable populations.

Nonetheless, even as global health complexes attempt to improve infrastructures and thereby insulate vulnerable bodies from this infectious disease, the disease itself creates new entanglements (Nading, 2014). A person contaminated by the virus prompts their family to contemplate their relationship with their friends and families and their state authorities. The processes by which bodies and environments come into being are thus always interconnected. The spread of the coronavirus throughout Asia, and eventually the rest of the world, disrupted existing arrangements among species, peoples, institutions, and nations – remaking biological and political relations along the way. As individuals moved across different geographies, the invisible and sometimes stigmatized 'Other' moved with them, participating in othering those with whom it came into contact along the way. That a privileged minority is able to maintain a certain way of life while others may have to fight for their lives draws attention to an unequal power dynamic that characterizes the process of othering.

Zoe's cruise experience unsettles the traveller's understanding of global mobility as one of natural privilege by pointing to the social and historical circumstances that have led to an uneven development of the globe (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). It is essential to consider how the pandemic has amplified social and structural inequalities around the globe and particularly intensified vulnerability for poor and marginal groups (Farmer, 2006). While certain countries struggled with numerous socio-economic challenges in addition to the pandemic, others were able to focus all their energies on the pandemic solely. While some individuals were able to stay at home and protect themselves and their 'bubble' or community, others have been forced to continue working in environments that come with much higher risks of COVID-19 contagion. Additionally, acute concerns about social, cultural, political, and technological change were refracted from the news through the figure of the virus, provoking fresh anxieties about the porosity of economies,

ecologies, and societies (Caduff, 2015). However, the worries faced by small islands such as environmental degradation due to climate change, inefficient or absent infrastructure for transporting goods, and an economic over-reliance on tourism had not disappeared with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

With the pandemic, many resources became limited on the more remote, isolated islands, thus worsening their vulnerabilities and increasing the consequences of potential contagion (UNCTAD, 2021). Although islands and mainland ports refused entry to the cruise boat to avoid dealing with a petri dish situation (Awoniyi, 2020), passengers on the boat also wanted to avoid the islands and the mainland until the global crisis settled. While being stranded at sea for two unforeseen weeks, Zoe admitted that she was mainly concerned with having access to Wi-Fi for work. She is aware that millions of people were facing unemployment and economic hardship due to the pandemic (Stoller, 2021). Even though "an adventure was fine for me, it was not so much for the elderly – that the cruise goes on longer because of the ports refusing us entry" (Zoe, 2020). Although the passengers were not too concerned about the virus COVID-19, other substantial worries were forming regarding the access to medications and the decreasing amounts of food on the boat. Not only did the cruise last longer than initially planned, but it was also unforeseen that the ship stayed at sea for the entire duration.

Futilely waiting for the situation with COVID-19 to unfold, the boat was going around in circles around the Pacific. Anxiety onboard was rising, as resources such as food and medication were impoverishing. After being stuck at sea for two weeks longer than originally planned, seeing as how desperate times call for desperate measures, one of the cruise engineers sabotaged a propeller to remediate the situation. Since the ship was initially flagged in the Bahamas, that would have been the only place that would have legally been obligated to accept the vessel – which means

that it would have had to return through the Panama Canal. Given that there were only two propellers on the boat, having one now inoperative meant that the ship had to be taken somewhere. Honolulu eventually took the damaged boat in, and the cruise line organized chartered flights for all passengers to return home.

No Borders

Countless individuals such as Zoe have seen people around them judge them for travelling during these times of difficulty. Interestingly enough, not many people around Zoe have dared to confront her regarding her activities. Instead, she told me that they have stopped supporting her more subtly, like unfollowing her on *Instagram*, no longer engaging with her personal blog, or sharing their disapproval in the comments section on *Facebook*. Zoe documented most of her peripeties with the cruise on her social media. Under a photo of her disembarkation from the cruise, a friend criticized her for having boarded in the first place, calling Zoe "idiotic" and "ungrateful."

Nevertheless, despite criticism from an emotionally charged media, Zoe chose to continue her travels in the safest possible way, complying with local public health measures. The fear of contamination results from the pollution of space surrounding the bodily territory (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021), pollution that she constantly manages through the rituals of washing her hands, sanitizing her personal objects, wearing masks in public spaces, and maintaining a safe physical distance from others. She avoids crowded public spaces such as bars during her travels, although frequenting such establishments was not a habit of hers before the pandemic either. Zoe makes sure to respect the local health guidelines and follows the updates on travel restrictions, which helps her adapt to potential border closures. In our interview, Zoe admitted not having a clear idea of what she wanted to do or where she wanted to go after her stay in London. If the

global crisis has taught her one thing, it is that making long-term travel plans has become obsolete – at least for the next several months. The few arrangements that she had made for her summer travels had been cancelled, and she was unable to make new ones due to the uncertain nature of the current situation. In the current day and age, some argue that being flexible and adapting plans without a fuss "is the mark of a truly global citizen" (Tovia, 2021).

Since our last conversation, Zoe has reached her goal and marked one hundred countries off her list. She is currently roaming across the African continent, visiting fourteen new countries. Whether it be the local food that she tries, the activities in which she partakes, the people that she sees on the streets, or the COVID-19 tests that she does before and after crossing a country's borders, all of Zoe's adventures are documented on her social media. Despite the new difficulties and obligations to travel in the current climate such as COVID-19 tests and up-to-date vaccination requirements, Zoe is glad to resume her everyday lifestyle and regain a sense of normalcy as the restrictions on mobility are slowly being alleviated.

In her case, Zoe believes that she can control herself as a vector of transmission far more than she can control the economic fallout of COVID-19. Ethically, it became clear to her that spending American dollars anywhere outside of the United States was the best act that she could do, and that is how she has felt about travel for an extended period now. Characterizing her reflection process as purely utilitarian, Zoe says that "as a single transmission vector, even if I had [COVID-19] and was walking around giving it to everybody, the numbers of lives that I would impact are smaller than the numbers of lives that I impact for the amount of money that I am spending here" (Zoe, 2020). Several geographical areas of the developing world have not been hit hard with COVID-19, yet there has been massive suffering and social unrest because of the resources diverted to the western industrial world to manage the crisis. With globalization, many

countries have become economically dependent on some aspects of trade and travel. The trickling repercussions of declaring the outbreak of coronavirus a global health emergency have been severely felt in the tourism industry. It is conceivably one of the sectors of society most sensitive to abrupt changes due to unwanted phenomena (Günay et al., 2020).

The conditions upon which the industry operates have been deeply affected by this crisis. In fact, the tourism industry had reached such heights before the pandemic that almost a quarter of jobs around the world revolved around it. With the sudden halt in travel and tourism, over sixty-two million jobs were lost due to the crisis (WTTC, 2021). In January 2020, the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO) projected a three to four percent growth in international tourism for the year (UNWTO, 2020). This projection was revised in early March 2020, and the organization now predicts a decline between twenty and thirty percent, which translates to an estimated loss of $1.3 trillion in international tourism spending. For Zoe, "as an American, anywhere that [she] spends her money is a political act, and that's what justifies the morality of travel more than anything else" (Zoe, 2020). She actively seeks to create revenue for the people in the travel industry and the communities that cater to it. In the end, for her, it is about the economic impact that she may have.

With a background in healthcare, in bacterial infections more specifically, Zoe read numerous scientific research papers on the novel coronavirus. According to her, the science reported in mainstream news does not match the non-industry-supported science printed in scientific journals. At the time of our interview, there was still, in fact, very little that was known about COVID-19, such as its transmission vectors, its infection rate, or its antibodies, and the scientific studies being published often contradicted each other. The uncertainty in the scientific community often translated to even more confusion in the public community. One of the post-

secular debates is whether science operates with a limited conception of truth. Indeed, it is powerful and has enabled all kinds of discoveries and inventions, but it may not work so well in grounding the right and the good (Lambek, 2015). Zoe expressed that her main concern was in regard to access to truthful, accurate information. “How do I make choices in this world, with the context of information that I have about what is ethical?” (Zoe, 2020).

Science does not provide a secure ground for ethics or a viable guide for living. The questions that it answers do not provide reassurance on which actions are right or advice on how to resolve ethical conflicts, including those that scientific discovery created in the first place. Nevertheless, that is where ethics come in. Ethics can answer other kinds of questions, such as how one should live and what kind of person one should be and inform individuals’ actions accordingly. More broadly, ethics do not solely concern the matter of self-cultivation but also encompass both one’s relations to the ‘Other’ and the decisions about right and wrong acts (Lambek, 2015). Making the right decision is not solely achieved by following an ethical code. Instead, ethical conduct can *emerge* in certain situations. In cases with unforeseen circumstances and unique events such as those generated by the pandemic, individuals may suddenly find it difficult to maintain or even identify ethical actions without reflecting upon them deeply.

There has always been a backlash against Zoe’s lifestyle – whether it was a matter of the environment, privilege or luck. However, Zoe points out that it is cheaper to travel full-time than to live in a room in an American city with three other roommates. This can partly be explained due to the fact that she tends to travel to economies where earning money in USD is scaled differently. Nonetheless, Zoe admits that the timbre of disapproval has completely changed with the pandemic.

On the one hand, several individuals who suddenly disagree with Zoe's travels because of the global crisis seem uncomfortable confronting her about it. Instead, most simply unfriend her from social media or stop following her without saying goodbye. Since the beginning of the crisis, Zoe has witnessed a decrease in her followers on *Instagram*, friends on *Facebook*, and visits on her personal website. There is a lack of comfort in bringing up that conversation since there are multiple new ethical tensions at play in the practice of travel that need to be addressed and unpacked due to the pandemic. While a few individuals criticize the locally-implemented measures for favouring the economic well-being of the state over the lives of its citizens, others consider the restrictive measures adopted to be an overreaction, pointing to the limitations of individual freedom and to the economic damages these communities will suffer in the short and long-term (Moretti, 2020). Regardless of their positionality, many individuals state that travelling in the present circumstances is not ethical, yet very few justify those perspectives. Zoe mentioned during one of our discussions that prior to the pandemic, she had loyal armchair fans that were deeply involved in her travels. The journeys she recounted through photos and reports brought joy and meaning to their lives. However, several of them stopped following her adventures once the context changed for that of a pandemic.

On the other hand, Zoe told me that there is also a core group of individuals, which she refers to as 'cheerleaders,' that believe that people should not be sacrificing their lives for this virus, especially when looking at the mental health problems, the suicides, and the overdoses that the measures may cause, which outweigh the mortality rates of the coronavirus itself. These individuals support and encourage her to travel because they realize that such activity stands as her way of passionately engaging with life. In the shadow of these discussions lays an issue of much larger ethical impact: what does this health crisis teach us about individual responsibility

and our positioning towards the coronavirus and the vulnerable populations in a time of globalization?

The disagreements surrounding matters of ethics in travel in our present time stem from differences in understandings and perspectives. As mentioned earlier, Zoe's nomadic practices have been labelled as 'non-essential' even though they have come to represent part of her existence. Her movements and the meanings which she attributes to them come to shape her perspectives. Her past experiences inform her current decision-making processes. Zoe's understanding of the concept of mobility is much more expansive than that promoted by most authorities worldwide. In her case, her personal experiences offer specific frames of reference and ways of knowing, which then come to serve as criteria for action. As anthropologist, Michael Lambek says, "if ethics is about how things matter for us, then it is also about how we matter to ourselves, and as ourselves" (Lambek, 2015, p. 45). Movement has come to play a central role in Zoe's self-definition. Even though ethics may not orient us with respect to goals, projects or modes of living, it underpins our behaviours, personal dignity, and respect for others. For an action to be deemed ethical, an individual must have the freedom to choose to act in that specific way. Being good would hardly be of ethical consequence if one did not have the freedom to be good or bad.

Anthropologist Veena Das defines freedom as "the minimal condition that in most cases one could have acted otherwise" (Das, 2015, p. 68). When faced with ethical dilemmas during her travels, Zoe bases her judgment on her personal past experiences, values, and convictions and makes decisions accordingly. Not every scenario comes with the same ethical dilemmas, as some regions are categorized as 'hotspots' and pose a higher risk of infection, while other areas are deemed of lower risk but are also more vulnerable (Compton & Sampson, 2021). Taking morality as a sociocultural system of codes and norms indicating right and wrong, ethics can be understood

as emerging from the practices and techniques performed on oneself to become moral (Foucault, 2005). Ethics are constituted by the problematization of the normalized norms, the imagination of alternatives to those norms, and the practice of new relational possibilities (Lambek, 2010). Whether it is about partaking in a cruise in the middle of a global crisis or voluntarily self-isolating upon her arrival in Boulder, Zoe anchors her actions into the realm of ethics, which may not necessarily equate to that of morality. By subjecting her options to her own self-evaluative and self-interpreting processes, Zoe makes decisions that she perceives as being ethical.

Although the pandemic has raised a new set of distinct issues, Zoe was already accustomed to several of the ethical discourses surrounding the practice of travel. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, the continuous increase in global mass tourism had raised numerous ethical questions, especially concerning the matter of sustainability. In an era characterized by changes of scale, the world has become more open and accessible to all (Augé, 1995). Many popular tourist destinations faced over-visitation and environmental degradation (Fetters, 2018). Zoe believes that burning jet fuel for travel pursuit cannot be seen as ethical in the day and age of climate change. However, to maintain an average-level ecological footprint, Zoe compensates for her high energy expenditure activities in other ways. For instance, she is "a lifelong vegetarian who doesn't have nor wants any children" (Zoe, 2020). Zoe is highly aware of these ambiguities embedded within some travel practices. However, the truth is, she said, that she can only care so much.

While countries have been implementing more sustainable development policies for tourism, various tensions have been rendered visible through the process. As travellers experience different places and perceive themselves to be citizens of the world, their presence often sustains the tourism industry and perpetuates anthropogenic effects (Moore, 2019). Nevertheless, the halt in tourism due to the pandemic provided a glimpse into what a world with less travel and tourism

could look like, and Zoe hopes that this snapshot moment offered by the global crisis serves as an opportunity for restructuring the industry. Recognizing her own role in participating in the harmful impacts of global travel, she wonders how things could change for the future.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

The category of perhaps
is perhaps the best category to refer to
what remains to come.

- Jacques Derrida

Worldwide Hiatus

The global crisis generated by the outbreak of COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges to the practice of travel. While matters of sustainability, resource depletion, economic dependency, heritage preservation, over-visitation, terrorism, and cybersecurity still pose significant concerns, the pandemic has produced new issues that have come to dominate the entire tourism sector (Vărzaru et al., 2021). Many countries worldwide were dependent on a thriving and robust tourism industry for their economies and have been experiencing severe difficulties since the beginning of the crisis. Over a year and a half has passed since the outbreak of coronavirus was declared a pandemic, and countless individuals and businesses are eager for tourism to be 'normal' again.

The following chapter details a few of the issues faced by the tourism sector and looks at how the pandemic has impacted the industry. It analyzes some of the trends that have gained in importance during these uncertain times, such as armchair tourism and translocal tourism, and examines how these practices can help solve several of the challenges in travel and tourism. As a tenuous easing of mobility restrictions began, many countries have started welcoming international travellers again. In this chapter, I trace the tensions regarding the future of travel by analyzing the story of Anshul, whose travels were cancelled in consequence of the pandemic. Through his narrative, I paint a reality that also relates to that of countless other travellers. By providing context

to Anshul's reflections and speculations, I situate the current reality of the tourism sector and explore its future alternatives.

Going Global

The tourism industry was riddled with problems even before the beginning of the pandemic. Since the mid-twentieth century, human activity has increased at an astounding rate (Steffen et al., 2015). Changes in energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and population growth have thrust the planet into the epoch of the Anthropocene. These accelerating pressures are coming together to generate a global sustainability crisis that highlights the challenges of climate change, financial instability, and development inequalities (McNeill & Engelke, 2014). Human connectivity has grown at a dramatic and unprecedented pace since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, which is directly observable in international tourism (Coles, 2015).

In the realm of travel and tourism, matters of sustainability, economic dependency, heritage preservation, over-visitation, and environmental degradation have been at the centre of most ethical discussions. Prior to the pandemic, many online travel communities were encouraging their members to discuss such issues on their groups, pages, websites, forums, podcasts, and other digital platforms, with the goal of raising awareness. Touristic activities contribute over ten percent of the global domestic product in the world and rank third in global exports (WTTC, 2021). However, the tourism sector is also responsible for ten percent of the greenhouse emissions worldwide (UNEP, 2020). The commodification of landscapes creates tourist imaginaries that cater to an increasing number of individuals (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). The global discourse of sustainable development primarily emerged in response to the tendency for capital to undermine the ecological conditions upon which its accumulation is based (Ensor et al., 2017). Tourism

development projects that transform the landscape into natural parks or reserves raise a specific set of concerns regarding the balance between preservation and conservation. Although they aim to protect the area and raise awareness about the environment's fragility, they often sustain the industry while perpetuating its anthropogenic effects by attracting increasingly large numbers of tourists (Moore, 2019). This has led to problems of coral bleaching, illegal hunting in international waters, and overcrowding of parks. Many regions lack the resources, capital, and preparation to adequately manage these influxes of tourists, which further degrades the environment, often at the cost of the local population's well-being (Fetters, 2018). Significant skepticism regarding future tourism developments has been voiced (Smith et al., 2006). The volume and exponential growth of tourism activities thus pose significant challenges to the industry (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, most of these unsustainable tourism practices were brought to a pause in March 2020, when the WHO raised the COVID-19 public health emergency to the highest level of concern and called on all countries to take urgent and aggressive action against the virus (WHO, 2020b). As the news resounded far and wide and stilled the clatter and traffic of 21st-century life, countless human beings around the world paused and looked around them. Stores were shut down, beaches and resorts emptied, public spaces deserted, and major world events cancelled. Authorities worldwide put into place different stringent measures to limit people's movements, and travel among different regions became strictly controlled. Global travel paradoxically became both a primary carrier of COVID-19 and victim.

In the travel community, the outbreak of coronavirus generated a halt of indeterminate length in mobility that unsettled many individuals' daily lives and routines. Backpackers, digital nomads, weekend travellers, *vanlifers*, and other types of tourists have had their travel plans

paralyzed by the aggressive measures implemented by governments to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate the global crisis.

Drawing on Janet Roitman's work, this chapter examines the notion of crisis as a performative act or a call to action, which can manifest on both the levels of the individual and of society (Roitman, 2013). By declaring that COVID-19 constituted a crisis, authorities worldwide referred to the virus as an event, with a beginning and an end, upon which they had to act. Such event can represent an opportunity to rethink things and radically change the structure in place. In the context of travel and tourism, the COVID-19 crisis manifested in a variety of ways.

Anshul

For Anshul, a middle-aged man living in a large city in Canada, the unprecedented circumstances brought on by the pandemic provided him with the time and environment to slow down and reflect on new possibilities of living (Calhoun, 2018). As his work transitioned to a virtual position and his planned travels were cancelled, he took refuge in his home and patiently waited for a return to normalcy. Living in such times of uncertainty has stimulated particular forms of philosophical reflections for Anshul. "I am constantly self-reflecting and reflecting on my own circumstances against somebody else's, and constantly asking myself things like what I would do or what I could have done differently?" (Anshul, 2020).

The confrontation with death and disease often results in a period of profound reassessment and reappraisal of life (Yedidia & MacGregor, 2001). The loss of stability and certainty, the social isolation, and the overall disruption caused by the pandemic has led many people to experience feelings of disorientation, confusion, and anxiety. In the face of a "meaningless reality, a seemingly absurd world" (Sfetcu, 2020, p. 35), existential anxiety manifests itself through reflections and re-

evaluations of one's personal life and the meanings they attribute to it. It typically occurs when an experience of freedom and responsibility results in negative actions or choices (Crowell, 2020). Existentialism explores the nature of existence by emphasizing the experience of the human subject (MacQuarrie, 1973). According to philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, it is not the role of society or religion to attribute meaning to elements in life but rather every individual's responsibility to live with passion, sincerity, and authenticity (Kierkegaard, 1992). Realizing death can drive people to re-evaluate their life choices and live a more meaningful existence from the point of recognition forward. Outlooks on death are thoroughly grounded in individuals' frames of reference for giving meaning and consistency to other significant events in their lives (Yedidia & MacGregor, 2001). The pause from everyday life that stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity for Anshul to reassess his past, situate himself in the strange circumstances of the present and reframe his visions of the future (Knouse, 2020). The pandemic impacted society in a way that opened a possibility for newness.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the neoliberal market mechanisms of global tourism by halting mobility, it also provided countries with a respite from the issues that global mass tourism entails. By restricting foreign travellers' entry through strict lockdowns and border closures, many regions around the world noticed positive effects on the environment, especially in urban areas (Monteiro et al., 2021). The absence of travellers from sites like Venice in Italy, Everest in Nepal, or Ko Pha-Nga in Thailand has brought into focus what can be regained in suspending over-tourism; clearer water, reduced air and noise pollution, decreased public waste, and more (Clifford, 2020). Along with the slowdown of manufacturing activities, the significant reduction in local and international travel has diminished pollutants in several localities worldwide (McGrath, 2020). Anshul believes that the pause brought on by the pandemic "is a great chance at

correcting the over-tourism problem" (Anshul, 2020). This combination opens the possibility for local populations to view their immediate surroundings in a whole new way (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020).

In an era of great acceleration (McNeill & Engelke, 2014), the pandemic has shown us that we need to change how we live, travel, and see the world. Mass global travel and trade practices were riddled with problems that would not have sustained the industry for much longer. The free movement of people, goods, money, and information has promoted a greater concentration of individuals and activities in specific spaces around the globe (Fujita & Hamaguchi, 2020), which have also facilitated the spread of the coronavirus. On the planetary stage, anthropogenic climate change, mass species extinction and the SARS-CoV-2 have made it clear that the old ways of living are so destructive that they cannot possibly be maintained (OECD, 2020). The current situation in the tourism industry has drawn attention to many frictions between economic limitations and potentiality (Fowler et al., 2014). Illustrating the entanglements between the environment, economy, and human well-being, the ongoing global crisis offers us a few insights into different possibilities of futures. In the midst of this mayhem, some scholars question to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic represents an opportunity for the remaking of the tourism industry. Others, instead, call attention to the limitations of tourism research "in a world without tourists" (Gombault, 2020).

Working Remotely

In 2009, Anshul obtained a new position that required him to travel for several months at a time every year. For a man in his late thirties, living out of a suitcase, hopping cities, and relocating from hotel to hotel generated significant travel fatigue. Nevertheless, through the six

years he kept this position, Anshul became accustomed to the ins and outs of points, *miles*, and other reward or loyalty programs that help subsidize travels. He soon began applying these 'hacks' to finance his personal travels as well.

Now chief officer of the recruitment department at a higher education institution, Anshul does not move around as much. His team, conversely, travels extensively to promote the establishment to potential international students. They fly worldwide to distribute informational material, organize meetings, and present at conferences to advertise their institution. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ensuing travel restrictions, such mobile activities have been suspended indefinitely. Like countless other individuals, Anshul and his team had to adapt to remote work quickly. Perhaps to their own surprise, the transition to the virtual world has been so efficient that it has rendered similar results while significantly reducing costs. The academic world has also been increasingly recognized as an important contributor to the large gas emissions generated by travel. A research study conducted in 2018 by the University of Montréal concluded that a professor travelled on average 7.1 times per year for a total of more than 33,000 kilometres (Arsenault et al., 2019).

Globally, business travel accounted for around twenty percent of total tourism revenue prior to the pandemic, a majority of which was attributable to same-day visitors (Statista, 2021b). Daily commuters and travellers represented a significant part of the clientele for buses, trains, and flights. Since the advent of the coronavirus, however, the situation has drastically changed. The transportation system and, more generally, social mobility have suffered a major setback because of travel bans and widespread restrictions on physical gatherings and because they immediately suffered from negative perceptions owing to the fear of contagion. With mobility at a standstill, collapsing consumer demand, and low cash reserves, it only took a few weeks for the pandemic to

completely disrupt the geography of travel and tourism (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). Viewing as how many people transitioned to working from home, tourism, transport, and hospitality companies lost a significant number of their customers, which ultimately forces them to rethink their marketing approaches and to possibly focus on different kinds of travellers for their economic survival (A. S. de Rosa & Mannarini, 2021).

With the rapid advancement of the digitalization of professional activities, research suggests that almost half of the travel trips related to business will be replaced with virtual meetings in the future (Statista, 2021a). “Now that we’ve figured out ways of doing the same work without travelling, taking flights and hotels and whatnot just for a meeting or a couple of meetings is really going to fade away” (Anshul, 2020). Studies have shown a significant decline in people’s intentions to use public transport as well as an increase in willingness to travel by private car, which could potentially result in additional pressures on existing road transport infrastructures (Li et al., 2020). Based on the strategies adopted by the most resilient companies, such as the promotion of last-minute bookings, the virtualization of their reservation services, the ease of cancellation policies, and the flexibility to reschedule, the rest of the sector hopes to adapt by implementing similar changes (Toubes et al., 2021). Anshul believes that virtual and remote work represent an interesting avenue for employers to explore in the current era of the internet and technology. “Even the fact that you and I did the interview on *Zoom* has shown us that we don’t have to take a flight over for a meeting” (Anshul, 2020). As an individual attentive to his ecological footprint, he is excited for his department to implement such long-term changes to their work approach and is hopeful that others will follow suit.

Armchair Tourism

Despite the positive effects that have been noted on the environment, the economic downfall remains framed as one of the most critical indirect consequences of the imposed mobility restrictions. To remediate the losses caused by the pandemic, alternative forms of tourism such as armchair tourism have been advanced as a method for people to 'travel' during the global crisis. With the proliferation of the media since the beginning of the 21st century, virtual and imaginary mobilities have increased in popularity (Grieco & Urry, 2011). Anshul himself was engaging with the blogs of fellow travellers he had met during earlier trips. During our interview, he referred me to a few individuals who had become even more active on their blogs after the start of the global crisis. As mobility became restricted, Anshul shifted his use of virtual platforms from sharing his adventures to inviting people in critical discussions on the topic of travel. When the pandemic began, and people were kept grounded, many travel bloggers encouraged their followers to return to their past stories, adventures, photos, and 'travel' through them.

For many enterprises in the tourism industry, the emergence of new business models and revenue strategies determined the chances of survival of their firm. Innovative and adaptive capabilities thus played a vital role during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery (Engle, 2011). Virtual tours and activities gained momentum and popularity as museums, festivals, and touristic companies from all around the world began offering virtual experiences to compensate for the lack of physical tourism. From the comfort of their own couch, people could virtually climb the Machu Picchu, explore the soundscapes of Rocky Mountain National Park, take a virtual safari in South Africa, attend the Berlin Philharmonic, wander the British Museum in London, and even head to outer space with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Space Centre (Talty, 2020).

Such experiences break away the partitions of the tourist destination in a way that is no longer bound by geography. During the pandemic, virtual tours and technology have helped visit otherwise inaccessible places (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). As accessibility to physical tourist sites posed problems for people with disabilities and less privileged individuals, it remains a concern for virtual tours in terms of "ease of use, necessary equipment, and visual impairments" (El-Said & Aziz, 2021), which are essential to consider in this regard as well. Nevertheless, armchair tourism offers an alternative to tourism during uncertain and critical times (Nanni & Ulqinaku, 2021).

Explore Your Own Backyard

Another form of tourism that has gained significant traction since the beginning of the pandemic is that of translocal tourism. With continued international travel restrictions and border closures in place, people who desired to vacation were confined to areas close to their place of residence. Numerous countries have thus seen a resurgence of domestic travel and 'staycations' (Stankov et al., 2020). As many individuals reflect on what is truly important to them, they take the current circumstances as an opportunity to escape large urban areas and 'return to nature,' to take time to slow down and to discover their own backyard. The restrictions on mobility have created a surge of visitations to parks and forests as citizens venture to lesser-known or populated destinations within their own countries (Benjamin et al., 2020). The promotion of domestic travel helps mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on jobs and businesses in several destinations that depend on tourism for their economy. As the recovery of international tourism is likely to be slow, the hospitality sector, more specifically, can benefit from domestic demand (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). Domestic tourism helps sustain the local economy that depends on tourism spending and offers a chance for the local population to view places typically over-crowded by international

tourists. Potential changes might call for adaptation in terms of leisure lifestyles, such as substituting long-distance travel with vacationing nearby and relevant changes in managing the industry (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015).

A few years ago, Anshul and his wife began travelling for leisure, with a specific interest in whale watching. Every August, their anniversary month, the couple leaves the big city behind and spends some time in more remote regions, appreciating nature. They particularly enjoy tracking whales up and down the East and West Coast of America to follow their migratory patterns. When the pandemic hit, however, the airline company annulled all of its flights, and the couple's yearly trip was cancelled. As Canada's inland travel restrictions started easing, Anshul decided to explore his own country further and booked flights to Yellowknife and White Horse for later in the fall. Domestic airlines such as Air Canada offered "really lucrative promotions such as fifty percent back on tickets for any destination in Canada bought with *miles*," which is "a great promotion for people to explore their own backyard" (Anshul, 2020).

However, as the time for the trips approached, Anshul started hesitating whether he should stay or go. Thinking about the ethics of travel, he perceives the current climate as serving as a great added filter. "Now people really have to think about their choice to travel" (Anshul, 2020). Anshul's moral compass ultimately led him to call off his visits to Yellowknife and White Horse that were going to take place later in the fall.

Anthropological literature on the 'self' suggests that some individuals may understand their decisions and behaviours as consequences of their 'self', while other make sense of their 'self' as a result of their decisions and behaviours (Luhrmann, 2006). Theories on subjectivity define the concept as referring to the "ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so

forth that animate acting subjects" (Ortner, 2005). In this case, it is noticeable that it is Anshul's sense of 'self' that has guided his decision of cancelling the trips.

Part of his decision process was informed by the reality that these isolated communities in the Great Canadian North would not benefit from his stay, except for trivial touristic income perhaps, and might even suffer considering the risks that such visit could pose. Although the measures imposed by the government at the time would not have prohibited his trip from taking place, Anshul recognized the problematic nature of his 'local' travel. Leaving from a highly populated city with an elevated number of COVID-19 cases to visit a remote town, albeit in the same country, would pose the same risks as leaving from that city to visit a remote xtown in a different country. By creating a fictional scenario in which the roles would be reversed, Anshul realized that as a local, he would not feel comfortable seeing tourists arrive in his small town in the middle of a pandemic. Another critical factor that weighed in his decision-making process was the guarantee of full reimbursement for his cancellations. Being well-versed in the *miles* system, he knew sufficient 'hacks' to avoid committing to full-priced, non-reimbursable flights. These reward and loyalty programs allow for much more flexibility with scheduling activities, booking flights and accommodation, and renting cars, which is particularly valuable in the current circumstances. Nevertheless, Anshul admitted being able to imagine a scenario in which he would have made a different decision. Would he not have received a full refund on his cancelled trip, "you bet your bottom dollar that I would have been on that flight" (Anshul, 2020). He would have voluntarily gone and quarantined for fourteen days in Yellowknife because the circumstances and motivations would have been different.

Living Ethically

This fictional scenario speaks to an essential aspect of mobility that has yet to be addressed. The limitations on mobility impacted people from lower-income classes at disproportionate rates. Although the vast majority of individuals reduced their movements once physical distancing and lockdown measures were introduced, studies have shown that wealthier people were more likely to stay at home sooner and more often (Cuebiq, 2020). This difference has been attributed to the fact that people with higher incomes tend to have greater flexibility to work from home, reducing their exposure to the virus and diminishing their risk of falling ill (Jetten et al., 2020). The multitude of factors that need to be considered when analyzing individuals' mobile practices in the current context makes the classification of such activities a highly complex task. "Knowingly putting someone at risk versus unknowingly putting someone at risk while trying to achieve something else" (Anshul, 2020) is a subtle but significant nuance that Anshul underlines to differentiate between ethical and unethical uses of mobility. This reasoning has become a common discourse used to discourage individuals from travel, especially in isolated areas where the consequences of propagating the virus would be severe. Although the pandemic has emphasized several economic, social, and structural inequalities, it also presents an opportunity to solve them. The suspension and re-evaluation of our infrastructures can represent "a path toward imagining that creating a space of possibility for the 'Other' is itself a mode of living ethically" (Das, 2015, p. 75).

As an increasing number of travellers ponder on their personal behaviours and aim to reshape them in more ethical ways, many also consider the larger infrastructure surrounding tourism. The crisis generated by the pandemic has brought the practice of travel and mobility to a standstill. For Anshul, this can provide transformative opportunities to imagine our 'self' and

'others' in new ways, potentially challenging current harmful, divisive or alienating ways of experiencing and understanding the world (Beaman & Sikka, 2016). Nevertheless, the future remains uncertain.

The Space Between

Currently, the recovery of the tourism industry is slow and inconsistent. Travel restrictions and border closures represent the main barrier to international tourism, along with the slow containment of the virus and the lack of coordination between countries to guarantee harmonized protocols and measures (UNWTO, 2021). Although some of the measures limiting movement are being lifted, concerns about new variants and future waves have been voiced.

Since the beginning of 2021, vaccination mandates and campaigns against COVID-19 have rolled out in most countries around the world. While the vaccine helps alleviate individuals' symptoms and reduce a population's contamination rates, it does not provide immunity and its efficiency remains uncertain against new variants. As such, the risks that the coronavirus posed at the beginning of the pandemic are still present two years later. The physiological repercussions of contracting the Delta or the Omicron variant today are comparable to those caused by contracting the original form of the virus in early 2020. The apparition of these variants perpetuates the uncertainty associated to travel restrictions, border crossings, emergency lockdowns, etc. Additionally, most of the initial fears of overwhelmed health care systems, elevated mortality rates, dropping population mental health, and overstressed economies also represent risks that are still being mitigated today.

While global mass travel and trade represent the primary vehicles through which the virus spread to different areas around the world, their role has significantly reduced with time. Mobility

was posited as being one of the *first* causes of transmission of the virus, but not necessarily the *main* one. The free movement of people, goods, money, and information has promoted a greater concentration of individuals and activities in specific spaces around the globe (Fujita & Hamaguchi, 2020), which facilitated the spread of the virus from a region to another. However, the vast majority of cases appeared from local outbreaks within a country's borders.

In early 2020, the initial protocols implemented at the time aimed to 'flatten the curve' and to eliminate the virus entirely. However, when looking at how events and measures put in place to manage the pandemic unfolded throughout time, it becomes apparent that such goal is impossible. A retheorization of risk is thus necessary in order to shift our focus from trying to eliminate the virus entirely to learning how to live with it. Nevertheless, implicit to the currently implemented measures and protocols is the assumption that travel ought to remain limited. It remains an activity that is morally condemned, even in 2022. The new demands placed on travellers such as tests, vaccination mandates, and quarantines may deter many individuals from engaging in mobile activities.

The coronavirus outbreak does not mark the first time in the history of tourism that mobility has been challenged. Anxieties regarding travel conditioned by fear of viruses also arose in 2009 with the swine flu caused by an H1N1 virus, and in several other scenarios as well. In most of these circumstances, the industry displayed its resilient character, proving itself to be a sector capable of undergoing variations and modifications (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). Nonetheless, it is not solely a question of *when* people will be able to travel internationally again, but also *how* people will do so. "In a time of intense uncertainty, social strife, and ecological upheaval, what does it take to envision the world as it yet may be?" (Pandian, 2019).

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, there were intense discussions about the challenges of over-tourism, including issues related to resource and waste handling, labour exploitation, and benefit redistribution (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Since the beginning of the pandemic, tourism has experienced a drastic collapse in demand for its services and a shift in the kinds of services it could still provide, given the current circumstances. Despite the negative repercussions of the global crisis on the industry, experts believe that the tourism sector is highly resilient and will grow again. The key elements for the industry's recovery are attention to security and sensitivity to health-related aspects, which can manifest by organizing smaller groups' visits, providing more personalized services with new technologies, and offering a greater variety of experiences for tourists (Toubes et al., 2021).

Along with the rise in domestic or translocal tourism, several other changes have been identified among individuals who travel during the global crisis. Changes in the demographics of travellers have occurred, as travel recovery has been more substantial among younger segments of the population. There has also been an increase in last-minute bookings, attributable to the volatility and unpredictability of the pandemic and its related restrictions, and rural tourism in natural parks or remote areas has emerged as a popular choice of destination due to the travel limitations and the quest for open-air experiences (UNWTO, 2021). Additionally, travellers have also been giving more importance to creating a positive impact on local communities, increasingly looking for authenticity and sustainability.

Tensions are materializing as some argue the need to reinvent tourism in the post-pandemic world, while others hurry to return to 'normal' travel conditions. Anshul believes that in many overly touristic cities, we will "see it going on a similar path to what Rwanda does with its gorillas or what Nepal is now doing with the Mount Everest trek; they are now giving a restricted number

of permits to foreign tourists," which "will allow for better economic growth in the longer run, and allow us to also see our own backyards a lot more" (Anshul, 2020).

Binding the notion of sustainability to tourism is thus important as the future remains uncertain regarding different types of crises such as landscape and heritage conservation, which may not be as immediate as the ongoing crisis, yet just as relevant. For a region to become a resilient tourist destination, it must be structured to cope and adapt to external disruptions (Adger et al., 2002). The tourism industry has arrived at a crossroads, and the measures put in place today will shape the tourism of tomorrow (OECD, 2020). A few months ago, the UN Environment Programme developed a plan to move from over-tourism to sustainable tourism by "building more resilient communities and businesses through innovation, digitalization, circularity, sustainable finance, sustainability and partnerships" (UNEP, 2020) in order to address the crises of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. The underlying goal of this plan is to transform the tourism sector towards a future that is as pandemic and climate-proof as possible.

Although it is difficult to holistically observe a global crisis that is currently ongoing, this historical and social moment may lend itself to repositioning and redeveloping places and structures of the territories of tourism, bringing them more in line with international criteria of sustainability, ethics, and aesthetics. To make such changes possible, it is necessary to reallocate resources, mitigate over-tourism, invest in environmentally-responsible forms of tourism, and care for the local people are areas (OECD, 2020). An innovative solution could be to create networks among the public sector, private tourism companies, and local communities to work synergistically for the territorial re-evaluation and development of new, alternative forms of tourism in line with the new needs expressed by tourist demand (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). Implementing new

tourism policies is essential to avoid returning to the ‘old normal’ involving a high growth strategy based on extensive infrastructure development.

As we transition into a new phase of ‘normal’ life, it is essential to consider how the present crisis has opened an unprecedented situation that allows us to grasp the opportunity to rectify an otherwise flawed global system (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). When considering the value generated by tourism, other potential forms of value such as cultural, educational, symbolic, social, intrinsic, and institutional value should be considered alongside economic value (Richards, 2021). Even though 2020 marks the first time in eight years that Anshul and his wife did not go whale watching, the situation with COVID-19 “has been giving us a lot of reasons and a lot of time to reflect on things, and see what we will have to do differently, as things are going to permanently change from here on” (Anshul, 2020).

Conclusion

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things
which escape those who dream only by night.

- Edgar Allan Poe

Over a year and a half has passed since the beginning of the pandemic. By now, most countries have lessened their restrictions on mobility and reopened their borders, in part or in totality. National and international travel is slowly gaining traction again as several popular tourist destinations are offering promotions on holiday packages and flight deals as an attempt to revive tourism (OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, rebooting international travel on a broader scale represents a complex and difficult task that has so far failed due to successive waves of COVID-19 infections (Hall et al., 2021). For most travellers, the COVID-19 pandemic was a disruptive shock that resulted in the loss of mobility, social contact, and quality of life (Toger et al., 2021). While some individuals like Boris and Zoe decided to move forward with their plans and pursue their travels, others like Anshul chose to postpone their trips to a future date. I, in turn, am in the middle of thinking and writing my thesis, while travelling domestically in Gaspésie.

It is the end of June, and a warm wind is slowly swinging me in my hammock. Above my head, the clouds are darkening. I left my backpack unattended, leaning against a wooden picnic table nearby. I look over at its scattered contents – *I will have to put my notes and books away*, I think to myself. The air is heavy, like a thunderstorm in the making.

It is still early in the season for tourists, I've been told. Many campgrounds, motels, and bed and breakfasts establishments have not even opened yet. The weather is still cold in the area, uninviting to many. I cannot help but imagine myself in Patagonian territory, where I was supposed to be a year ago. I could almost see myself standing in a hostel kitchen, waiting on my water to

boil for a pack of instant noodles. I would gather with fellow travellers, and we would discuss the interesting activities to do in the area. Maybe I would even meet a crew of climbers who would invite me to tag along on their next expedition. I would be so excited to join them!

But I look around. There is no one else here. My shadow is growing longer and longer, telling me that the day has arrived at an end, and I should return to my tent. I rise to my feet and, before turning around, let myself bathe in the smells of the ocean one more time. Deep breath in, deep breath out. My lungs are now filled with cold, crisp air.

Close enough.

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This thesis recounts the narratives of a few individuals' experiences of travel during the pandemic. Most of this work is based on fieldwork I have conducted online with a group of travellers, some more experienced than others, all travelling in their own particular style. I have tried to capture these stories in a holistic way, documenting and highlighting their multiple facets.

Each chapter identifies one or more frictions regarding the practice of travel in the context of the global crisis. These frictions are about conceptualizations, boundaries, invisibility, multiplicity, or some combination of the above. All around the world, the pandemic has entailed political and economic struggles over how to confront the relationships, not only between citizens and institutions, but also among individuals, viruses, and their shared habitat. As the virus reconfigured the uses of public and private spaces, it also blurred the distinctions between local and global infrastructures, bodies, and forms of knowledge. I argue that the ethical tensions that currently exist in the practice of travel are informed by different understandings of risk,

responsibility, mobility, and ethics. The three chapters presented in this thesis illustrate how the pandemic has generated new challenges to the practice of travel and how my interlocutors have responded to them.

The first chapter illustrates how the pandemic has disrupted the experience of travel through Boris' journey to the Balkans. More specifically, I look at how the new realities produced by the global crisis have transformed some of his travel practices. Situated in a specific spatial and temporal context, during a brief release of measures during the first and second waves of COVID-19 in Europe, Boris' stories highlight important ambiguities regarding the ethics of travel which I locate in different conceptualizations of uncertainty, risk, and moral responsibility.

In the second chapter, I share Zoe's Pacific Islands cruise story to further analyze the matter of ethics in travelling during the pandemic. By scrutinizing how she ascribes meanings to her mobility, I underscore the issues with attempting to distinguish between essential and non-essential movements. This chapter illustrates the complex path along which morality comes to be and the limitations of thinking with the 'Other.' Zoe's narrative helps address the entanglements of the virus in everyday life and examine the politics of moving during a global crisis.

The third chapter focuses on the travel and tourism industry and analyzes the trends of armchair tourism and domestic travel that have grown in popularity since the beginning of the pandemic. I introduce Anshul and describe his reasoning for renouncing travel during the pandemic. Through the sharing of his thoughts and experiences, this chapter looks at the changes that have occurred in the practice of travel during the pandemic and identifies a tension between the pressure to go back to 'normal' and the desire to change the industry. It argues that the

pandemic has produced new forms of reckoning with the costs of the tourism industry and a demand that we envision its alternative futures.

This project participates in the various theoretical and methodological disputes related to the discourses of the 'self,' self-making, the 'Other,' and ethics. It looks at the tensions and challenges that arise from these unique circumstances and explores how travellers navigate them in the current context. Rather than putting forward an argument for how to live in these uncertain times, the narratives shared throughout this thesis ask how living with the uncertainty, vulnerability, risks, challenges, joys, and sorrows of the everyday might reveal the contours of our ethical lives.

The coronavirus exposes the pitfalls of an over-reliance on tourism and provides a lens for rethinking global mass tourism. People negotiate and redefine mobility – in cooperation or resistance to various kinds of authorities – as they develop and deploy knowledge about what kind of life is worth monitoring, preserving, and reproducing. Given the uncertainties surrounding the ongoing development of COVID-19 and its socioeconomic, political, and health consequences, it is difficult to make firm predictions about the future of travel. Although travel bubbles and corridors between countries are measures that several policymakers have proposed, only a few have managed to take root (C. M. Hall et al., 2021). For many of my interlocutors, future diplomatic relationships between countries represent the main factor that will influence how and where they will travel in the post-pandemic world.

Since the beginning of 2021, several efforts have been underway to help produce and distribute vaccines against the coronavirus. As vaccination rollouts have begun in numerous countries around the world, governments are hoping for a swift recovery of international travel.

Nevertheless, given that several social distancing measures and travel restrictions remain in place in many areas around the world, and are likely to continue for some time, how travellers and the travel industry will adjust to the continuing threat posed by the virus when travel will resume is difficult to articulate. Discussions of vaccine passports, or certifications of vaccination, add another layer of complexity to the matter of mobility. The core rationale behind these passports is that public health restrictions limiting access to certain places and movement across certain spaces should be tailored to different levels of risk. While travel eligibility is the main focus of such passports, a few countries are also considering implementing them to regulate "access to social and recreational gatherings, workplaces, or schools […] and entry to otherwise restricted sites such as hotels, gyms, restaurants, theatres, and music venues" (Hall & Studdert, 2021). Although vaccination is a critical part of the solution to the global crisis, it comes with daunting issues of equal distribution and access, which will need to be overcome before tourism can see a rebound.

Additionally, it is not yet clear that current vaccines halt the spread of infection entirely, especially with regard to variants. Currently, countries have different requirements in terms of post-arrival quarantines, PCR tests, and vaccination certifications. Efforts will need to be deployed to homogenize the measures and requirements implemented to travel internationally. While this project presents a timely snapshot of the pandemic, it does not reflect what may happen in the future. Instead, it depicts how individuals and policymakers are navigating the large and complex space in between.

It is important to note that while the COVID-19 pandemic has become a main focus of this research, it also represents one of its main limitations. There are several methodological challenges associated with writing in the ethnographic present, especially this present. Conducting fieldwork online may have skewed participation by limiting it to individuals active on social media and

virtual platforms. The novelty of the current situation, the absence of previous references, and the uncertainty about the behaviour of travellers and the industry have also impacted this project. In addition, the qualitative data collection techniques used allow for better quality and depth of information, but at the same time limit the analysis information to the subjective storytelling of my interlocutors. As the pandemic is still ongoing, future research should continue to analyze the situation according to the evolution of the crisis, establishing new scenarios and avenues for the future of the travel sector (Toubes et al., 2021), particularly with regards to vaccine passports and matters of sustainability.

The current crisis could represent a crucial moment for changing the tourism industry and pursuing the kind of pathways of tourist innovation that is already foreseen. We have arrived at a critical crossroads: will we hold on to our old ways tighter than ever before, or will we let go of our previous attachments and embrace a different future?

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