them with arrows or introducing parts of themselves into the bodies of the Wari’. Disease is
seen as the process of transforming into an animal. One does not die, one becomes an other.

The metaphor of viral colonisation may thus serve to frame its opposite: in
Amazonia we are not seeing viruses (animal spirits) transforming into people by steal-
ing their genetic code, the purest distillation of identity, but rather people transform-
ing into animals, which are simply another kind of human. The agents of the disease
present themselves as another possibility of existence, inserting parts of their iden-
tity – their DNA or RNA, to continue the scientific metaphors – into their victims.
Moreover, while this struggle takes place on the bodily plane, it is essentially social.
The animals want people for themselves.

Invaders of Indigenous lands, however, like the viruses that they keep on bringing
with them, do so in order to keep on reproducing themselves, using local substrata:
water, forests, minerals. They leave a swath of devastation and death in their wake.
They are the viruses, devouring their own host.

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SERGIO VISACOVSKY AND DIEGO ZENOBI

When a crisis is embedded in another crisis

As social anthropologists, we feel more comfortable when we base our analyses on
ethnographic fieldwork. Obviously, this is impossible in the current circumstances,
due to mandatory isolation. Accepting these limitations, we want to outline a short
reflection on the responses and experiences that the coronavirus pandemic has pro-
vided in Argentina.

The first cases of infection in the country were detected around 3 March, just
over three months after Alberto Fernández became president. As a consequence of the
spending cuts implemented by his predecessor, Mauricio Macri, the pandemic reached
a country with a destroyed economy, a huge external debt, high inflation and unem-
ployment, a recession and almost 35% poverty. In addition, the Macri administration
reduced budgets for public health and scientific research, two essential areas to face the
current situation. So, the global crisis was received in Argentina by a pre‐existing crisis.

But besides, ‘crisis’ is part of the public and everyday Argentine lexicon. It refers
to specific moments, to an order of history as recurrent cycles. The coronavirus cri-
sis impacted on a country in serious socio-economic crisis, but at the same time the
responses to the pandemic from the State have been guided by specific visions of history.

From the beginning, the Fernández administration has presented itself as the
opposite of the previous one. But in facing the coronavirus crisis, the government has
been able to further define its profile. During this time, Fernández has defined the
government’s political identity in each public intervention, affirming that his objective is ‘to privilege health over the economy’ in order to ‘take care of Argentines through the State’. And frequently quoting Pope Francis (who, in turn, should have noticed that his words did not mean ‘communism’, but the words of Jesus), he questioned the rich, the speculators and the selfish ones. Instead, he called to create a ‘new ethics based on solidarity’. Fernández and other members of the government pointed out that their policies expressed these values. Of course, measures such as compulsory isolation of the population (established on 20 March) have deepened the deterioration of the economy. As a result, the government must respond to the desperate demands of the humblest sectors, of the small and medium business owners, but also to the requirements of the most powerful groups.

Despite everything, the government firmly defends its decision, maintaining that it is based on the scientific authority of prestigious doctors and researchers who advise the president. The coronavirus crisis has given the government the chance to define itself as the opposite of the previous one, and the dark present time as a new time that holds the promise of a different future. We want to suggest that these actions are better understood within local ways of conceiving history: a vision of the hopeful future prevails as the restitution of a long-awaited past, which is not the same for everyone. Among other things, invoking ‘care’ or ‘solidarity’ or basing decisions on scientific authority can be seen as restoring a fortunate past, even in the midst of a very serious situation in which the most vulnerable populations will inevitably be the most damaged.

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The pandemic present

Since the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, past events and future plans have collapsed into successive moments of uncertainty. Hundreds of thousands may die from this virus. Countless others could become casualties of collapsing economies.