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Coronavirus epidemic and its social/mental dimensions: the Turkey case

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1. Introduction
In his novel, which received the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature, Saramago described the unhealthy environment and the spread of epidemic diseases with the metaphor of “blindness.” Blindness here is defined as “not like a sudden swell of sea, which takes everything with it, but like thousands of little streams, which suddenly invaded the whole after sneaking into the ground slowly …” [1] (pp. 128) (Fig. 21.1). Blindness was like it is the coronavirus outbreak!

Due to the corona epidemic, all “total institutions” started to give break one after another. In Turkey, “meeting centers” (such as schools, universities, associations, clubhouses, restaurants, cafes, shopping centers, and many enterprises) were closed in order to prevent people from causing virus transmission to others.

1.1 Panic and the social anomy
As can be seen in other countries in the world, people in some regions of Turkey looted shops and a looting culture has revealed itself eventually. Panic was infected before the virus.

Behaviors are “infectious” when in a group (audience). Freud also introduces the concept of mass psyche (psyche: spirit, spirituality -HC). In the Heritage of Freud, René Kaës quotes the following: “If there was no assumption that accepts the community psyche that ensures the continuity of the psychic life of human, collective psychology and psychology of the peoples could not exist. If the psychic phenomena of one generation were not transferred to the next, did not continue with the next, every generation would have to start all over again to learn life.” In his book, The Group Mind, McDougall describes the spiritual behavior of an unorganized group as extremely emotional, impulsive, violent, inconsistent, unstable, and undecided. Unlike Freud and McDougall, mass is not necessarily a “chaotic and pathologic structure” in modern social
According to the related theory, collective behavior (mass behavior) is limited to the norms; the idea that the community (mass) psyche, that is, the spiritual structure of society, is transferred to the next generation belongs to Freud. This spiritual (psychic) structure inherited from the previous generation is stimulated by some events of individual life in order to be impressive. In order to explain that situation, Freud developed the concept of epigenesis (not hereditary but not genetic through DNA) in 1914 [2] (pp. 64-66).

There is the fact of irrational enemy creation in group behaviors. In the days of the coronavirus outbreak, that enemy has been the fear of hunger and starvation. The fear of starvation was an enemy and the enemy was attacked accordingly. The looting of the shops (albeit limited time) meant the defeat of the enemy in the mind. In the words of Saramago [1] (pp. 197), “fear without a good mentor” formed the source of distrust.

Many comments have been made on the spread of security concerns in areas where the fear of danger has not spread. In order to explain these states, stereotypical words that mean “we live in an aggressive society” are frequently used [3] (pp. 165).

According to Furedi, “fundamental existential concerns” have led to the institutionalization of security in many areas of social life [3] (pp. 165).

According to Jung, the spirit of primitive humans is essentially collective, and therefore a large part is unconscious. Trotter, who is inspired from Freud, attributes the mental phenomena defined in the groups to an innate “swarm instinct” in humans as in other animal species. In Mass Psychology and Ego Analysis, Freud argues that “The mass looks like the resurrection of the primitive human swarm.” About half a century after Jung and Freud, McLuhan, an important communications theorist, also describes humans as the “tribal human of the global village” [2] (pp. 68, 69).
The deterioration of social norms (in other words irregularity) constitutes an “anomy” in Durkheim’s words. According to the founding father of sociology, anomy is one of the collapses and suicide causes of the social psychology. The “not touching each other,” which is one of the recommendations given to prevent transmission of the coronavirus, norm meant the destruction of one of the most basic existential needs of humans.

According to the phylogenetic theory, the first human is a social creature, who has built his socialization by touching since existence. Touching means to exist and keeps our existence alive!

1.2 The power defeating the kings

Epidemic diseases have deeply affected societies throughout history. Organized social life has been disrupted, and also economic, psychologic, and mass moral breakdowns have occurred. Epidemic diseases that killed thousands, ten thousands, and even hundred thousands of people displaced emperors and overthrew kings. Plague (“black death”), dysentery, smallpox, typhoid, tuberculosis, cholera, typhus, bovine plague, Justinian plague, Spanish flu, and swine flu and in our age, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), mad cow, bird flu, and finally coronavirus are all known epidemics. These outbreaks can occur within the natural flow of life and have been especially seen within wars [4] (Fig. 21.2).

In today’s collective living institutions (schools, universities, dormitories, etc.), which we call “total institutions,” measures can be taken and meetings where people come together can be canceled to prevent an epidemic. However, in armies, which are the “biggest total institution,” it cannot be said to “go to your home,” and it has not been said generally.

In this chapter, I have provided a general view on the social and mental dimensions of the coronavirus epidemic by analyzing it in the context of Turkey. It is important that the

**FIGURE 21.2** The plague in Florence, 1348 (illustrating Boccaccio’s Decameron) [5].
appearance of this virus has caused many occurrences of both social and mental effects, and these should be discussed in detail by looking at the past and the psychologic roots of humankind. In this chapter, I have used many new concepts and these concepts are indicated with the sign of ®.

2. Looting culture and perspectives with phenomenology

2.1 Looting culture and the “extortion of the need”®

In the face of the coronavirus threat, which was described as the “pandemic” with the official announcement by the World Health Organization, people run to the shops in many places, and almost some of food products and colognies were looted. There are many reasons to act illegally and behave unethically. Those related to our subject are ego and power demonstration, greed, survival instinct, and individual gain. People bought two to three-times more than what they needed and did not think about others. This is called as an extortion event and I conceptualize it as the “extortion of need”®.

The concept of “norm conflict” acknowledges that failure to comply with formal or informal norms, and social values will drag the perpetrators into a conflict. “The individual has to comply with both formal and informal norms throughout his life. It is inevitable that they conflict with the law and legal order when they do not comply with the formal order. On the other hand, they conflict with the group (they live in) and the society (they belong to) when they do not comply with the informal order. In both cases, the individual becomes unhappy and restless.” [6] (pp. 315). However, those who extorted the needs of others during the virus epidemic days were not bothered by this.

It is possible to explain that as a “trauma effect.” The second part of Pavlov’s “conditional reflex” experiments is generally not known. Pavlov was ringing the bell while giving food to the dogs at the same time, and when the bell rang without giving food (meat), the dogs showed the same salivary secretion reflex. Pavlov wanted to repeat the experiment 1 day after a flood caused death of some dogs and he came across with a surprising result. The dogs did not show reflexes when the bell rang without giving them food. Thereupon Pavlov had made that not too much known conclusion: in cases of trauma (and intense stress) conditional reflexes disappeared as the animals did not show reflexes and obeyed. Even neurosis was occurring. This scientific conclusion presented to us by Pavlov, who won the Nobel Prize for such studies on the psychology of animal and human behavior, also explained why people did not comply with the norms and values. The fear of not being able to find food as a result of being closed home to prevent from a deadly virus epidemic caused great trauma and the values were turned upside down.

This shows us the judgment and stereotype that “Values continue to exist even in times that are impossible to realize, (or in other words) to be adopted by people” [6] (pp. 324) is not always true.
2.2 Understanding with the phenomenology

Our thoughts and stereotypes are created by the society and the cultural universe, which we are in and part of, respectively. Common assumptions and behaviors enable us to socialize and be cultured. However, phenomenology orders us to question the thoughts and behaviors that we accept without questioning and it works accordingly in this context.

Against the world, we all take part in a process of socialization with the patterns of thought that were adopted to us. Phenomenology asks us not to accept such patterns without exploring them. It asks us to question them (question directly our culture itself; in other words, question the way of seeing and welcoming the world we were adopted while growing up) [7] (pp. 544).

In the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that phenomenology is a form of action before becoming a doctrine or a system and assumes the task of revealing the mystery of the world and the mind [8] (pp. 28).

Phenomenology is the study of essences, and according to Merleau-Ponty, all problems relate to defining essences, for example, the essence of perception and the essence of consciousness. Phenomenology, however, is also a philosophy that puts essences into existence, arguing that we cannot grasp humans and the world from their “realities” (factivite´) [8] (pp. 9).

According to Merleau-Ponty, “Every consciousness is a consciousness of something” and this is nothing new [8] (pp. 24) (Fig. 21.3). Regarding the “perceptual belief” that results from our natural perception, Merleau-Ponty says,

We see things themselves; the world is that what we see (VI, 17). Our perceptual belief is our belief in the existence of things and our formation in the world. Every moment we live we confirm it without speaking. However, this certainty provided by my perception is a certainty left in the dark. These two thoughts, which can be experienced simultaneously without contradicting each other in practical life, put us into the paradoxes of perceptual belief when they are turned into a thesis. [9] (pp. 128).

3. Unethical criminal and the “produced anxiety”®

3.1 “Ethical crime” and “unethical criminal” against social panic®

What is done with the logic of “I gave my money, I got it” is legal at the first stage. However, since there is a punishment for every extortion, we face here an important sociological phenomenon and problem: “social ethical crime.”®

It is not an ethical behavior to “buy someone else’s right” in situations of great social need. We need to consider that as a “social ethical crime”® and apply a sentence penalty in return. This sentence should be decided together with the society, at least it should be
a “social condemnation.” This act of “unethical stockpiling” should be placed in the literature and laws as extortion of someone else’s need, legal-looking looting, and “unethical behavior” and should be punished as an “unethical crime,” in order not to harm social solidarity so that it does not cause social “moral panics” at the end.

Even ignorant societies do not mind disasters, but rather reinforce their ignorance. Lesson learners are only a few, as seen throughout history.

3.2 Risk society and the “produced anxiety”

The concept of “risk society” or “world risk society” belongs to the famous sociologist Ulrich Beck. According to Beck, people have shifted from industrialized society to risky/social structures. Modernity creates new risks from itself. Most importantly, these risks, which pose new threats to people, are again “produced by the human hand.”

The panic atmosphere that emerged worldwide because of the coronavirus epidemic has once again justified Ulrich Beck. Panics throughout history are increasingly experienced as a result of human’s own production. I think it is useful to summarize this situation as follows: “Today, human has become his own Frankenstein!”

Experts list the new risks of modernity as global warming, nuclear leakage hazard, wars produced by politicians in their own interests, food terrorism, and even “marriages!”

Modernity has brought the crises along with it, disrupted the psychologies, and transformed the society into an “anxiety society” by making people anxious/worried as “producing anxieties.” As it is seen during the coronavirus outbreak, such societies have been often forced individuals to “close in,” as not just during outbreaks.
4. Self-ostracism® and the coronavirus hallucination

4.1 Self-ostracism®

The corona epidemic led to mandatory quarantines as well as “voluntary” quarantines. Millions of people around the world have “closed” themselves to their homes for protection.

Humans with a congenial behavior in nature also have the opposite behavior: exclusion behavior. Faced with a social exclusion, the individual’s self-structure is disrupted and the individual undergoes a cognitive destruction. The ejection of the ego out of society is called as social exclusion (ostracism) [10].

One of the first examples of exclusion found in written texts can be seen in the Athens democracy. In one of the series of reports on the Athens Agora excavations, Lang mentions an application called ostrakismos dating back to the 5th century BC. Every winter, Athens citizens write a name on pottery pieces called ostraka. Here, they were voting to decide whether the rulers, who had a tendency to dictatorship, became too strong or too rich, should be exiled or not, and individuals, who received 6000 or more votes, were exiled for 5–10 years. A similar approach was observed in Sicily, and the voting here was done by writing on olive tree leaves [2] (pp. 71).

I call the behavior of “voluntary exclusion” shown by millions of people as closing themselves to home because of the Corona epidemic, as “self-ostracism.”

4.2 Hallucination of the invisible

A human condition that applies not only in modern societies but also for all time is “the psychology of believing the invisible.” William James, who is the founder of American psychology and the representative of the pragmatist movement, examines the topic of “Reality of the Invisible” at a religious level in the book Varieties of Religious Experience [11].

The fear of coronavirus, which we could not see with our eyes and thought that it existed “everywhere,” was a complete source of psychologic panic in terms of public health.

James says that what we cannot see has its own psychologic features [11] (pp. 63). According to the information in the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, “the sense of the existence of something turns into an evident hallucination within a few minutes” [11] (pp. 70). The fear created by the coronavirus, which we cannot see with our eyes, has also turned into such a hallucination in world societies. We started to see corona everywhere!

Eliminating a virus outbreak is not only about biology (the presence of the virus), chemistry (infection), and infection medicine (prevention of infection) but also related to sociology (imprisoning society at home, stopping life, closing places, etc.), psychology (the mood of those people), anthropology (above all human science, history), political science (political decisions to take), international relations, economics (economic losses arising from the stopped life), food science (what will be eaten and drunk), education science (closed schools), etc.
5. Political structure of the coronavirus and the cultural racism

5.1 "Demo-fascist®: political structure of a virus"

The corona epidemic has a social and spiritual dimension as well as a political dimension. I want to make a sociopolitical definition about that virus, which has always been given medical explanations and caused the masses to be trapped at homes.

The coronavirus, which is coded as COVID-19, has a “democratic” structure in terms of not distinguishing between rich and poor, king and normal, and unfamous and famous. Also, it is an imperative, nonverbal, “fascist” by imprisoning the masses and the whole world.

When a structure carries both democratic and fascist qualities together, a new concept emerges. I call that concept as “demo-fascist®” [12].

5.2 “Age discrimination” as cultural racism and the mistake: “social distance” instead of “physical distance”

The global coronavirus epidemic brought us new concepts. We started to misuse some of the concepts that already exist in the language of science, and we do not even know some of them at all. Initially, the related concept used incorrectly from age 77 years to age 7 years (I purposely reversed) was “social distance.”

The most known meaning of that social distance concept, which is used to describe the “physical distance” that should be left between individuals to prevent from virus transmission, is related to racism (Fig. 21.4). “Social distance” is the attitude followed toward people who want to be kept away from their ideas/minds/social aspects due to reasons on language, religion, race, color, etc. For example, Hitler’s attitude toward Jews is “social distance.”.

FIGURE 21.4 “Social distance” instead of “physical distance” [13].
Another approach that does not fit is to isolate people over the age of 65 years (briefly referred to as “65+”) from society. This is expressed in an unknown concept: “age discrimination!” Other names are “cultural racism,” “new racism,” or “symbolic racism” (readers are referred to Refs. [14,15] as two important sources about them).

The international name of “age discrimination” is “ageism.” In Wikipedia, ageism is defined as “the type of discrimination applied to any individual or group due to their age.” Age discrimination can be realized systematically or unconsciously. These can be defined as “corporate practices and policies that support biased approaches, discriminatory attitudes and stereotyped perceptions.” In other words, the closure of 65+ people to their homes is within the scope of this concept, even if it is for health and protection reasons.

6. Conclusion: Foucault, “big locking down,” and “the world is a great madhouse”

As given by Michel Foucault, examples from history shed light on people “being locked down at homes” today. Foucault expresses the examples of this as “locking down not only the mad, but also elderly, patients, unemployed, idlers, prostitutes, and everyone outside of the social order, in cities such as Hamburg, Lyon, Paris from 1650 to 1750” [16] (pp. 83).

This is a “filtering process” [16] (pp. 83). There are dangerous machines in our society: they sieve people, and filter, pick up, and lock down mental patients. Machines are considered to make these people normal. Question: Do they do their part? [16] (pp. 116). The filtering machine is blind to the person it is filtering [16] (pp. 117). The conversion machine does not know the limit of conversion. That is establishing a power relationship that allows isolation, closure, suspending rights and disrupting life. It is also to hit an indelible stamp [16] (pp. 118).” Foucault expresses that situation with the words, “The world (...) is a great madhouse” [16] (pp. 131). “Not to be included in the social body (...) To be expelled from the social space (...) Exclusion in its place!” [16] (pp. 220).

The coronavirus has turned the whole world into Foucault’s “madhouse” and the “panoptic prison,” which is watched by “an invisible enemy/virus.”

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