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Citizenship after COVID-19: thoughts from Poland

On 13 March 2020, the Polish Minister of Interior held a press conference announcing further state restrictions due to the COVID-19 epidemic. In a composed and solemn voice, he said to the media:

We have to close the borders against coronavirus. It is highly important. This is not a virus that originated in Poland, it is a virus that came from outside. I am extremely sorry to communicate to you a new rule. If you are not a citizen of our country, this is not the time to take a trip, to visit friends. The border is closed.

Later in his speech, the Minister spoke of exceptions for those foreigners whose lives were tied to Poland, stressing that they would have to go through a two-week quarantine if they wanted to enter the country (the same rule did not apply to Polish citizens). While I had grown rather used to the xenophobic rhetoric of the Polish governing national-populist elite that took absolute power in the country in 2015, it was clear that the COVID-19 crisis enabled further advancement of the nationalist agenda. As a foreigner and anthropologist, I have been sensitive the increasing usage of 'Poles' and the 'Polish nation' by politicians addressing the public, discursively excluding Others like me from the community in which our daily lives were embedded. And in much of my recent work, I have been trying to show how this nationalist politics was grounded in a specific historical narrative which produced national affective adherence by cleansing the collective imaginary from past, present and potential Others.

What was different in Kaminski's speech on the cusp of COVID-19 restrictions was the clear linking of the entitlement to enter the Polish territory to national citizenship. My fear is that the political leadership in countries like Poland that have been on the nationalism-fuelled authoritarian trail will be strengthened by what is happening during the COVID-19 emergency. The closing of national borders as an effective response to the spread of a virus – a danger discursively tied to the body of outsiders to the national community – can be used to justify the already strong exclusivist tendencies and to reinforce the coercive entitlements of these states. Hannah Arendt's insistence on the primacy of citizenship underlined by belonging to a political community asserts its continued relevance. And our role as anthropologists in this situation is urgent. Through teaching, research and public presence, we need to stay vigilant and insist on the prerogative of inclusive rules of citizenship across the world.

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Visual art experience during the coronavirus pandemic

It has been noted that under the COVID-19 pandemic, museums started to cultivate virtual connections with isolated audiences via online exhibitions. The question is, however, what audiences do with art now that museum spaces are physically inaccessible and what (if any) kind of sociality virtual accessibility to art might produce.

Figure 1 incorporates two images. The one on the right is a digital reproduction of *Alyonushka*, an 1881 painting by Viktor Vasnetsov, from the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Inspired by Russian folklore, Vasnetsov created a romantic visual symbol of loneliness and abandonment. The left picture is a skilful recreation of the painting's composition, background, posture, palette, etc. Yet it is not about *Alyonushka* and folklore but about self-isolation during the pandemic. The picture intelligently considers the pandemic agenda: instead of the pond, the woman in the photograph stares at a space bordered with shoes, and sighs as she is unable to go out wearing them due to the quarantine.

Consider a Russian online flash mob *#isoisolation*, an example of how audiences can reapproach art. As of 17 April, a public Facebook page includes over half a million people, with hundreds of posts published daily. Group members select a painting to recreate using objects at hand. Then, this re-enacted work of art is photographed and uploaded on Facebook along with a picture of the original.

What might strike one about this phenomenon is not only its considerable scale and virus-like quick dissemination within a transnational Russian-language internet community. The flash mob occurred in parallel with, and perhaps as a response to, museums' attempts to bring works of art into isolated homes online. While virtual tours can well educate, the novel techniques of art re-enactment do more than that. Ultimately, we are observing the emergence of a new mass form of experiencing visual art and a nascent form of sociality that is centred on these novel representations.

All this deserves attention from anthropologists, sociologists and historians of art. Re-enactments of paintings are a unique corporal-material language of art interpretation. A new art public is being configured. *Isoisolationists* are not necessarily