RETHINKING DEMOCRACY IN AN AGE OF PANDEMIC

CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

[Rethinking Democracy in Age of Pandemic](#) was a special series organised by the [Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute](#) and [Society of Fellows and Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University](#) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The series ran from April 27 to May 27 2020.

The series consisted of one panel and five workshops. Driven by the Arts and Humanities, it endeavoured to provide nuance and long term perspectives. This was, however, a multidisciplinary endeavour, drawing speakers from more than 22 disciplines ranging from history, law and peace studies to medicine and neuroscience.

The series went beyond the academy, with writers, journalists and artists featuring on panels, and civil society representatives and policymakers as invited participants. Utilising live streaming and video/podcast recordings, it also interacted with a wider public audience.

While centred on the US and Ireland, the series applied a global comparative lens to the experiences and responses of different countries. This includes a detailed discussion of India as well as reflections on Brazil and South Africa. Participants in the zoom room were drawn from 18 countries (five continents).

These conversations built upon issues addressed in the free [online Crises of Democracy curriculum](#) launched in March 2020. The curriculum, which includes videos, podcasts and readings, is the product of the Global Humanities Institute on the crises of democracy funded by the [CHCI (Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes)](#) and the A.W. Mellon Foundation. Both the Trinity Long Room Hub and the Heyman Centre were involved in this project with partners from Brazil, India and Croatia. [See the Crises of Democracy Curriculum here.](#)

Reflecting upon the success of the Crises of Democracy curriculum and the rich discussions facilitated by the new workshop series, the organisers decided to produce a Rethinking Democracy in an Age of Pandemic curriculum.

Although the Rethinking Democracy workshops very much focused on the now – dissecting the unfolding events of April and May 2020 – the challenges the series deals with are not new. When, or if, the virus is eradiated, these problems will sadly endure. As the landscape continues to change, the analysis, solutions, and hope now preserved within this curriculum will remain relevant.

To mark the launch of this curriculum, three speakers were invited to reflect on subsequent developments and future challenges in three podcast episodes recorded in November and December 2020. The podcasts and show notes have been included in this curriculum.

DEMOCRACY IN AN AGE OF PANDEMIC

An introductory panel discussion exploring what pandemics and public health crises mean for democracies around the world.

Ahuvia Kahane, Regius Professor of Greek (1761) and A. G. Leventis Professor of Greek Culture at Trinity College Dublin discusses what we might learn from the catastrophic plague which struck Athens in 430 BCE and marked the end of democracy in Ancient Greece.

Lilith Acadia, then Marie Skłodowska-Curie Cofund Fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub, explores how we can use tools to evaluate the trustworthiness of governments' justifications for policy changes in times of crisis.

Shamus Khan, professor of Sociology at Columbia University, analyses the links between Covid-19 and patterns of inequality and explains why the virus is an opportunity to do once unimaginable things that would make for a better world.

Peter Baldwin, professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), considers the politics and policies of disease prevention.

The panel discussion is part of the Trinity Long Room Hub Behind the Headlines Series supported by the John Pollard Foundation.

Listen to a recording of the democracy in an age of pandemic panel discussion here.

Reading list:

- Acadia. Lilith. "Coronavirus pandemic is putting civil liberties at risk." *Irish Times.* April 9, 2020.
- Baldwin. Peter. "Can There Be a Democratic Public Health? Fighting AIDS in the Industrialized World." In *On Shifting Ground: Health and Space in Twentieth Century Europe*. Edited Susan Gross Solomon, Patrick Zylberman and Lion Murard. University of Rochester Press, 2008. 23-44.
- Kelaidis, Katherine. "What the Great Plague of Athens Can Teach Us Now." *The Atlantic.* March 23, 2020.
- North, Anna. "Every aspect of the coronavirus pandemic exposes America's devastating inequalities." *Vox.* April 10, 2020.
- Pamuk, Orhan. "What the Great Pandemic Novels Teach Us." *New York Times.* April 23, 2020.

Resources:

- Trinity Long Room Hub. "Behind the Headlines discussion series."
- University of Virginia. "Democracy and the Pandemic series."
- Freedom House. "Democracy during a Pandemic."
- COVID-DEM Info Hub. "Databases."
- ACLU. Pandemic preparedness materials.
- Stanford Digital Civil Society Lab. Civic Freedom and the Pandemic.

NATIONS AND BORDERS

In an effort to contain the spread of Covid-19, many countries have tightened their borders. There have been stark differences in national responses to the virus, informed by divergent priorities and different readings of the available science. This workshop explores how the pandemic is changing how we think about nations and borders.

Etain Tannam, Associate Professor of International Peace Studies and Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on political cooperation in Northern Ireland and Ireland, with divergent responses politicised and feeding into existing stereotypes.

Sarah Stillman, staff writer at *The New Yorker* and former Director of the Global Migration Project at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, discusses immigration policy, internal borders, and the politicisation of the virus in the US.

The workshop is chaired by Susan McKay, a writer and journalist from Derry in Northern Ireland.

Listen to a recording of the nations and borders workshop here.

Reading list:

− Evershed, Jonathan. "Brexit, the Irish border and Coronavirus." March 20, 2020.
− McKay, Susan. "Arlene Foster is distancing herself from Boris Johnson. Here's why that matters." *The Guardian.* May 13, 2020.
− Page, Kathleen R, Venkataramani, Maya, Beyrer, Chris and Polk, Sarah. "Undocumented U.S. Immigrants and Covid-19." *The New England Journal of Medicine.* May 21, 2020.
− Stillman, Sarah. "When deportation is a death sentence." *New Yorker.* January 8, 2018.
− Tannam, Etain. "The future of UK-Irish relations". *European Journal of Legal Studies*: 2019, 175-304.
− Washington, John. "The Trump administration is using the pandemic as an excuse to target immigrants and asylum seekers." *Vox.* May 15, 2020.

Watch:

− Brexit: a cry from the Irish Border. Written by Clare Dwyer Hogg and narrated by Stephen Rea. *Financial Times*, 2018.
− Living Undocumented. Directed by Aaron Saidman and Anna Chai. Netflix, 2019.

Questions:

− How do the American, Northern Ireland and Irish experiences at the centre of this workshop compare to global developments in ideas about nations and borders during the Covid-19 crisis?
− To what extent has the pandemic augmented existing challenges rather than creating new problems?
− Has Covid-19 strengthened international cooperation or intensified rivalries and hardened borders?

MARGINALISED GROUPS

This workshop explores how Covid-19 is affecting those on the margins of our societies. As the virus exposes long-term challenges and brings once-obscured groups to the fore, our speakers ask if the pandemic is an opportunity to change attitudes, implement reform and build better, more inclusive societies.

Rosemary Byrne, Professor of Legal Studies at NYUAD, explores the pandemic as part of the broader forces of globalisation and considers how, on a national and local scale, the virus is exacerbating social and economic problems, worsening xenophobia, and highlighting our hypocrisies.

Rose Anne Kenny, Chair of Medical Gerontology at Trinity College Dublin and Principal Investigator of The Irish LongituDinal study on Ageing (TILDA), focuses on age, one of the major risk factors for COVID-19 infection and complication. She discusses the failings of the care sector and entrenched issues of ageism.

Vincent Schiraldi, Senior Research Scientist at the Columbia School of Social Work and co-Director of the Columbia Justice Lab, analyses the dangers of infection and community spread in correctional facilities and outlines problems posed by probation and parole systems.

Listen to a recording of the marginalised groups workshop here.

Reading list:

- American Probation and Parole Association survey.
- Bachelet, Michelle and Grandi, Filippo. "The coronavirus outbreak is a test of our systems, values and humanity." March 12, 2020.
- Bradner, Kendra and Schiraldi, Vincent. "Racial Inequities in New York Parole Supervision." March 12, 2020.
- Columbia Justice Lab. "Too big to succeed: The impact of the growth of community corrections and what should be done about it." January 29, 2018.
- Executives Transforming Probation and Parole (EXiT). COVID-19 Response.
- Gidla, Sujatha. "We Are Not Essential. We Are Sacrificial." *New York Times.* May 5, 2020.
- Jedwab, Remi, Koyama, Mark and Johnson, Noel. "Negative Shocks and Mass Persecutions: Evidence from the Black Death." *Journal of Economic Growth* (forthcoming).
- Kenny, Rose Anne. Dublin Talks: How healthy communities will help you live longer.
- Kenny, Rose Anne. The end of ageing.
- Science Advice for Policy by European Academies. Transforming Ageing in Europe; Fighting Ageist Age Discrimination. 2019: 53.
- The Marshall Project. "Probation and Parole Officers Are Rethinking Their Rules As Coronavirus Spreads." March 4, 2020.
- Vincent Schiraldi, "We should listen to Rayshard Brooks about probation." June 23, 2020.

Resources:

- COVID-19 Law and Human Rights Observatory, Trinity College Dublin.
- The Irish LongituDinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), Trinity College Dublin.
- Columbia Justice Lab, Columbia University.

INEQUALITY

This workshop interrogates the role of inequality in the Covid-19 public health emergency. Our speakers explore issues related to class, gender, race, sexuality and religion as well as attempts to assign blame and scapegoat. Looking to the future, they discuss the need for a broad project of and commitment to equality.

Sucheta Mahajan, Professor at the Centre for Historical Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University and former Trinity Long Room Hub Visiting Research Fellow, focuses on the Indian experience of the pandemic. She discusses issues relating to class, race, and religion, and the use of the virus as a pretext to further dismantle democratic structures.

Colm Tóibín, award-winning Irish novelist and Mellon Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, situates responses to Covid-19 into battles about science and libertarianism in the United States. He discusses European Union failings, and argues that in Ireland empathy cannot be allowed to obscure long and short-term shortcomings in public health policy.

Shamus Khan, Chair and Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and former visiting research fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub, examines the need for moral as well as technical solutions to Covid-19 and future public health crises.

Listen to a recording of the inequality workshop here.

Reading list:

- Aratani, Lauren and Rushe, Dominic. "African Americans bear the brunt of Covid-19's economic impact." *The Guardian.* April 28, 2020.
- Dorn, Aaron van, Cooney Rebecca E, and Sabin, Miriam L. "COVID-19 exacerbating inequalities in the US." *The Lancet* 395, 10232 (2020): 1243-4.
- The Economist. "Closing schools for covid-19 does lifelong harm and widens inequality." *The Economist.* April 30, 2020.
- Gettleman, Jeffrey, Schultz, Kai and Raj, Suhasini. "In India, Coronavirus Fans Religious Hatred." *New York Times*. April 12, 2020.
- Kalache, Alexandre. "Coronavirus makes inequality a public health issue." *World Economic Forum.* April 13, 2020.
- Palshikar, Suhas. "Minimise democracy, maximise interfaith distance, maintain aloofness from poor — may be the new normal." *The Indian Express.* April 22, 2020.
- Mohan, Srikant, "Global response to Covid-19: Tailoring approaches for the developed world." *Medium.* April 23, 2020.
- Vera, Chema. "COVID-19 Thrives on Inequality." *Project Syndicate.* April 13, 2020.
- United Nations. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Women." *UN Policy Brief*. April 9, 2020.

Questions:

- Why have some groups been hit harder by the virus than others, and why does the pandemic threaten to deepen divides?
- How can lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic be applied to tackle the climate emergency and future public health crises?

THE EVERYDAY

As health systems struggle to cope with the rapid spread of Covid-19 and billions of people worldwide live in some state of lockdown, this workshop examines the implications of Covid-19 on the everyday.

Rishi Goyal, Director of Medicine, Literature and Society at Columbia University, and an Emergency Medicine doctor, argues pandemics, endemics and infectious diseases, are not exceptional events. He interrogates concepts of biopower and calls for humanistic and humanitarian scientific consensus and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Shane O'Mara, Professor of Experimental Brain Research and Director of the Institute of Neuroscience at Trinity College Dublin, explains why apocalyptic visions have not been realised during the pandemic, what this says about human behaviour, and why walking is so important to our everyday lives.

Rita Duffy, Artist in Residence at the Trinity Long Room Hub, discusses projects disrupted by the virus and shares some of the pieces created during the Dublin lockdown. Her work demonstrates the power of art as a tool for social engagement, humour, and means of working locally while thinking globally.

Watch a recording of the everyday workshop here.

Reading list:

— Duffy, Rita. "Art in a Time of Pandemic: Jogging in Lipstick." *Trinity Long Room Hub COVID-19 Crisis Blog*. April 1, 2020.
— Duffy, Rita. "The Emperor's New Clothes." June 2020.
— Goyal, Rishi. "A Letter from the Emergency Room." *Synapsis.* May 15, 2020.
— O'Mara, Shane. "Walking Is the Best Thing You Can Do for Your Health." *Outside.* May 13, 2020.

Resources:

Society of Fellows and Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University. "Care for the Polis: Cities, Health, and the Humanities."

Trinity Long Room Hub. COVID-19 Crisis Blog.

DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A PUBLIC SPHERE

The traditional means of debate and protest have been constrained by the measures introduced to contain the virus. At the same time, decision-making processes have become increasingly opaque. The crisis has also changed the nature of public discourse. This workshop explores the difficulties created and the chronic challenges exposed by Covid-19.

Bill Emmott, writer and former editor-in-chief of *The Economist*, considers the fate of liberal democracies through the pandemic and the role of the social media public sphere. He warns that while the first stage has been characterised by social cohesion, the real test for democracy will come in the economic aftermath.

Melody Barnes, co-director for Policy and Public Affairs for the Democracy Initiative at the University of Virginia, examines the chronic challenges for democracy exposed by the pandemic. She discusses the continued exclusion of the historically marginalised, reflects on the role of technology, and calls for new and innovative ways to support and expand the public sphere.

Fintan O'Toole, *Irish Times* columnist and award-winning writer, explains how Covid-19 has undermined 'strongmen' leaders worldwide while enhancing the global consciousness. He argues that public opinion continues to operate as a powerful force and stresses the need to ensure that the once-marginalised are not forgotten in the economic aftermath.

Listen to a recording of the democracy without a public sphere workshop here.

Reading list:

− Emmott, Bill, "The Political Risks of the Pandemic." April 12, 2020.
− O'Toole, Fintan. "Coronavirus has exposed the myth of British exceptionalism." *Guardian.* April 11, 2020.
− O'Toole, Fintan. "We are learning how much we rely on low-paid workers." *Irish Times.* March 28, 2020.
− O'Toole, Fintan. "Donald Trump has destroyed the country he promised to make great again." *Irish Times.* April 25, 2020.
− Payne, Elspeth. "What the Dominic Cummings scandal means for our democracy." *Her.ie.* May 26, 2020.

Resources:

− LBJ and the Great Society Podcast S2 E5: Give Us the Ballot.
− Emmott, Bill. "Crises of Democracy?" Trinity Long Room Hub. February 19, 2020.
− Re:New the Local. Race, Religion and Democracy Lab (University of Virginia Democracy Initiative). July 1, 2020.

Questions:

− What role does the public sphere play in liberal democratic systems?
− How can technology bolster and/or undermine the public sphere?
− To what extent has the Covid-19 pandemic forced a reconfiguration of the public sphere?
− How can we create a more inclusive, robust public sphere?

RETHINKING DEMOCRACY PODCAST: WHERE ARE WE? HOW DID WE GET HERE? AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In November and December 2020 we invited Melody Barnes, Etain Tannam and Lilith Acadia to reflect on the developments since the original Rethinking Democracy in an Age of Pandemic series.

Episode 1: Protests, polling and the culture of democracy.

In this episode, Melody Barnes discusses the developments in the Black Lives Matter movement, technology and misinformation, vaccine distribution and the 2020 US election.

Listen here.

Show notes:

o Democracy without a public sphere. Trinity Long Room Hub and Society of Fellows and Heyman Center Rethinking Democracy in an Age of Pandemic webinar series. May 27, 2020.
o Aftermath 2020. *Democracy in Danger Podcast: Episode 18*. December 9, 2020.
o Barnes, Melody. "A Culture for American Democracy." *Democracy*:59. Winter 2020.
o Kahrl, Andrew and Barnes, Melody. "A Global Contagion." *Trinity Long Room Hub COVID-19 Crisis Blog*. November 4, 2020.
o Barnes, Melody and Walker, Corey D.B (eds.). *Community Wealth Building and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*. Cheltenham (UK) and Massachusetts (US): Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020.
o University of Virginia Institute of Democracy. Election 2020 and its aftermath.
o University of Virginia Institute of Democracy. From Election to transition.

Episode 2: Trust, borders and Brexit.

In this episode, Etain Tannam explores the erosion of trust in British-Irish relations, issues of stereotyping, and the future of cross-border cooperation in the wake of Brexit and Covid-19.

Listen here.

Show notes:

o Nations and borders. Trinity Long Room Hub and Society of Fellows and Heyman Center Rethinking Democracy in an Age of Pandemic webinar series. April 29, 2020.
o BREXIT. Trinity Long Room Hub Behind the Headlines. May 26, 2016.
o Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland. Interim Report. November 26, 2020.
o Tannam, Etain. LSE blog posts. 2017-20.
o McGee. Harry. "Taoiseach distances himself from united Ireland, points to co-operation as way forward." *Irish Times.* October 22, 2020.
o McGreevy. Ronan. "Irish people should not stereotype the British, says President." *Irish Times.* December 4, 2020.
o Kane. Conor. "Trust between EU and UK 'damaged', says Coveney". *RTÉ*. September 13, 2020.
o Martin. Micheál."Online address by An Taoiseach on Shared Island." October 22, 2020.
o Machnamh 100. December 4, 2020.

🎧 Episode 3: Uncertainty and post-pandemic recovery.

In this episode, Lilith Acadia examines the dangers of epistemic uncertainty and the possible use of post-pandemic recovery as a pretext to ignore pressing global issues, including climate emergency and social inequality, in the United States.

Listen here.

Show notes:

o   Democracy in an Age of Pandemic. Trinity Long Room Hub and Society of Fellows and Heyman Center for the Humanities Behind the Headlines. April 27, 2020.
o   The Hublic Sphere Podcast.
o   Churchwell. Sarah. "Can American democracy survive Donald Trump?" *The Guardian.* November 21, 2020.
o   Pfattheicher, Stefan. Nockur, Laila, Böhm, Robert, Sassenrath, Claudia, and Petersen, Michael Bang. "The Emotional Path to Action: Empathy Promotes Physical Distancing and Wearing of Face Masks During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Psychological Science* 2020:31(11). Pp 1363-73.
o   Ripple, William J , Wolf, Christopher, Newsome, Thomas M, Barnard, Phoebe and Moomaw, William R. "World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency." *BioScience* 2020: 70 (1). pp 8-12.