INFORMATION AND LIABLE RELATIONS OF WELLBEING DURING COVID19: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF DISRUPTION IN LONDON

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a consideration of information as constitutive of the individual experiences of wellbeing, community, and responsibility. Situated in the context of the COVID19 pandemic and its manifestation across the year 2020, the paper traces the multiple and ever-changing epistemological and ontological formations within an online residents' group set up and run by the local council of a borough in London. The authors note the *othering* by the group as a mirroring of inherent structural differences and similarities in contrast to the cohesive and essentialized social unit narrative advanced by the local council. Exhortations regarding wellbeing and responsibility in the pandemic are realised and continue to be realised through evolving assemblages of data, information, and probability on the one hand, and testing, tracing, and vaccination on the other. They are in a relation of *becoming*: manifestly and at once the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus and the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community. In this manner, information constructs liable relations and, consequently, engenders individual responsibility and mutual reciprocity

which shape the understanding and experiences of wellbeing. Finally, the paper argues that while information was a measure by the state to build individual responsibility, it was further enmeshed by the group members themselves as community resilience, thus, shaping reciprocity and liable relations amongst them. As *Homo Reciprocans*, they were (and are) not only the objects but also the subjects of information. This paper is rooted in research which was presented at the 2021 annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA).

KEYWORDS Responsibility, Wellbeing, Information, Community, Relations, Reciprocity

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INTRODUCTION

Initially, COVID19 was a distant idea for Londoners, something trumpeted on television, and the stuff of watercooler conversations in offices. However, by the middle of March 2020, as the nation stepped into its first lockdown, in the sense of a "social quarantine"[1], the pandemic had suddenly hit home. The literal invisibility of the virus manifested initially as a material absence: the absence of people on the streets, the absence of traffic, and the absence of toilet paper. When the balance of the supermarket shelves had been restored, the evolving phenomenological realization of an invisible virus spurred a powerful and disruptive sociality: that of information.

The virus and its imaginaries evolved with time and over the multiple lockdowns and tiers of social restrictions which were alternatively imposed, lifted, and imposed again in the United Kingdom over the year 2020. Information and its varied forms came to take centre stage, through their discourses of accuracy, inclusion, and applicability, as well as their continually shifting entanglements with caseloads, testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. We note that such permutations of information and the pandemic were never static or unidirectional. Rather, and thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, they underwent continual configuration and reconfiguration, enmeshed in a process of *becoming*, where "everything is always crossing over into something else, decomposing and recomposing itself".[2] Set against the ensuing "instantaneous zigzag"[3], the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus and the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community were foregrounded. In turn, and as we have endeavoured to demonstrate, this fashioned an engendering of liable relations of wellbeing, in the form of simultaneously individual responsibility and community resilience. As residents of London ourselves over 2020-21, we were both consumers and producers of such forms of information and relations. Indeed, it was the information that shaped our own experiences during the pandemic, making its inherent invisibility visible, be it the virus, the

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 216.

[2] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self From Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 144-145.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 278.

restrictions, the risks of infection, or even how the community was responding. It is the ethnographic exploration of this fluid and recrudescent pandemic, equally as virus-borne as it was (is) socially experienced through and as information, that inspired our research and in which we position our paper.

FIELD, METHODS, AND QUESTIONS

Over 2020, the pandemic saw various responses from the state apparatus, communities, and individual citizens. In one of the more ethnically diverse boroughs of London (name of the borough withheld to maintain confidentiality), a COVID19 Community Champions group was set up and run by the local council. Residents of the borough could volunteer to become members. The group would meet online every week for the moderators to share pandemic- and wellbeing-related updates. As Community Champions, members were expected to do their part by forwarding the advice they had received to the other networks they were part of. If the Community Champions group was thus a shared "social space"[4] rooted in information and well-being, and at a time when lockdown restrictions meant that meeting physically and in person was neither possible nor permissible, then we borrow from Sahlins to posit that it provided for such coevality and participation as was at once intersubjective and with a "consubstantiality which …[was]… locally defined". [5] As our first research question, then, we asked if the assemblage of humans, virus, and information (such as that provided by the COVID19 Champions Group) determined the perception of wellbeing as an object of knowledge, and accordingly, shaped kinship relations within communities. After all, Sahlins, whilst building on a rich ethnographic legacy, described a "kinship system" (whether natal, post-natal, affinal, or performative) as a "manifold of participations, founded on mutualities of being".[6] Kinspersons, he advanced, "lead common lives, they partake of each other's sufferings and joys, sharing one another's experiences even as they take responsibility for and feel the effects of each other's acts".[7]

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[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 26-27.

[5] Marshall Sahlins, "What Kinship Is (part one)", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (2011): 14.

[6] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 10.

[7] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 14.

Inherent to Sahlins' argument then, was a sense of mutuality or reciprocity. In fact, Sahlins provided a typology of reciprocal relations based on kinship and social distance.[8] Price extended this, arguing for a reconsideration of such a categorization of reciprocity in the light of all idioms used to create or reaffirm interpersonal ties, and not merely the two advanced by Sahlins.[9] And if information was the idiom through which the pandemic was lived in the everyday, then in examining how individuals defined wellbeing, as our second research question, we also sought to understand whom they included in the web of reciprocal relationships.

Our inquiry had to keep pace with the pandemic's dynamic discourse. Situating ourselves as members of the COVID19 Community Champions group, we adopted observant participation as our methodological praxis and carried out our research between October 2020 and January 2021. Our research field was public in the sense that Community Champions were volunteers, as were we. As mentioned earlier, the Champions received regular information and the latest advice from the council and public health authorities. This was done through weekly connect calls (over video-conferencing), email newsletters, and a WhatsApp group. As stated previously, they were, in turn, expected to share this information with their wider networks to thus help the community make informed decisions. Moreover, Champions were provided with a platform to raise questions on the weekly calls, where access to local health experts and decision makers was often provided. These then came to define our research methods as well. We carried out observant participation in the Community Champion forums, which had us "participating in order to observe and understand"[10]. Additionally, we analysed the email newsletters as public culture in the sense of "an arena … in which the emergent cosmopolitan cultural forms… shape each other".[11] And, finally, we reviewed the conversations in the Champions WhatsApp group with an intent to practice in-situ, real-time research, while regarding the group as a social networking site where "the previously dyadic contact with each friend or relative …[is]… co-present in

[8] Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Routledge, 1972).

[9] Sally Price, "Reciprocity and Social Distance: A Reconsideration", *Ethnology* 17, no. 3 (1978): 343.

[10] Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

[11] Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?", *Public Culture Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1988): 5.

the same space".[12] Of course, our positionality as anthropologists with an interest in the on-the-ground realities of COVID19 was explicitly articulated by us during our orientation call with the council representatives as well during our introductions to the rest of the Community Champions attending the weekly calls.

In his lecture 'The Question Concerning Technology'[13], the German philosopher Martin Heidegger questioned the inevitability of a technology as just an instrument or as a means to an end. He argued that the world always offers manifold potentialities, and by making us choose a technology as a possibility, the world is merely helping us establish our purpose, our raison d'etre. In this manner, the essence of technology goes beyond technology. Understanding this essence is perhaps key to understanding ourselves and what it means to belong to this world as much as what meanings the world presents to us. This essence, which predates the reality or the actuality of the technology as the chalice itself, is indeed what shapes the *chaliceness*. An inquiry into the *chaliceness* can inform our understanding of why the chalice (and not something else) came about. In other words, the *chaliceness* is socially constructed and presents social, political, environmental, and other potential consequences. Borrowing thus from Heidegger, our third research question queried whether the online socialities in which our study was anchored perpetuated the *chaliceness* of existing boundaries within a community, thus, placing the Other out of consideration of the notions of national wellbeing and implied governmentality[14].

As we noted earlier, the pandemic was phenomenologically realized through and in (data and) information. For the Community Champions, this implied weekly calls, email newsletters, and WhatsApp group chats, apart from other digital, online, and televised media, as they might have been able to access. Yet, if we view the Champions as having understood not only the virus but also the community itself in the sense of datafication, our final research question asks who emerged in the process: the *homo economicus* as privileging relations of

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12 Heather Horst and Daniel Miller, *Digital Anthropology* (New York: Berg, 2012), 149.

13 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (London: Harper Perennial, 1977).

14 Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 87-104.

utility and self-interest, or *homo reciprocans* as foregrounding reciprocity and liable relations?[15]

ANALYTICAL UNITS

Information was our first analytical unit. Its construct kept shifting as the pandemic waxed and waned across multiple lockdown phases. Its many formations included public health messages, the data collected through contact tracing, the expedition of testing availability, the restrictions on account of different rules and tiers, as well as the prevalence and form of myths, such as on the vaccines, as vehicles of misinformation and disinformation.

The second unit was the *community*. As relevant for our research, this entailed two facets. First of these was the COVID19 Community Champions themselves as a community of purpose, and their interactions, questions, and debates during the weekly calls and on the WhatsApp group offered the pursuit of distinct lines of inquiry. Who were these Community Champions? What had brought them here? How did they perceive their role? And what elements did they want to understand and clarify? The second facet was the community the Champions represented, or in other words, the residents of the borough and the social, religious, and volunteer organizations or groups they closely engaged with. These two lenses (of defining the community) also yielded important considerations of their "consciousness" and boundaries[16]. On the one hand, the boundary for the Community Champions, while defined in terms of their role as well as the choice to participate in engagements with the local council, often proffered the experience of other lassoed-in meanings, such as the privileging of certain forms of knowledge and evidence, language, access to local volunteering groups, as well as their own ethnicity. On the other hand, the Community which the Champions intended to represent was often defined based on the demographic elements of age and ethnicity as well as through functional units within the community, such as social

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[15] Ruy Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", *Boston Review* December 1998/January 1999, (1999)·

[16] Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 15 and 21.

housing inhabitants, highly vulnerable groups needing priority access to health services, religious groups practicing communal worship and education, and those dependent on food banks, amongst others. Interestingly, these boundaries did not materialize geographically as one borough versus the other but instead materialized within the borough as one ethnicity versus the other, those getting tested as opposed to those who did not, those wearing the mask properly as against those who negotiated it, those who had the means to remain isolated versus those who did not, and perhaps most importantly, the humans who were not 'able to carry on their daily lives' as pitted against the virus, which carried on mutating.[17]

Our third unit of analysis was *wellbeing*. In the context of the pandemic, we explored the epistemology of wellbeing as an object of knowledge presented by the local council to the Community Champions as well as a flow of emergent meanings finding its *placeness* in the everyday, that is, as embodied and expressed by the Community Champions and the networks they, in turn, represented. As we will show, wellbeing was translated into the semiotics of borough case rates, testing percentages, and infection probabilities. Wellbeing was the individual's responsibility, but 'support from the council' was also continually reiterated as being available.[18]

CHAPTER 1: AN EXPLORATION OF DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES AS *CHALICENESS*

The Community Champions call in the week before vaccinations began in the UK witnessed much excitement. The Moderators chose to leverage the understandable enthusiasm to solicit ideas around how different members of the community could be galvanised to support the council's efforts. This was coming against the backdrop of a series of anti-vaccination messages which had been circulated in the borough, over online media as well as through paper flyers slipped under front doors and into mailboxes.

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[17] Field Notes, 2020.
[18] Field Notes, 2020.

Online breakout rooms based on different categories of community members were created, and participants were asked to join a room of their choice. The one we joined aimed to discuss how young people could be involved more. In addition to the two of us, there were nine participants and one Moderator to facilitate conversation. At the beginning, the Moderator outlined a three-fold agenda: agree on what had been going well, what had not worked, and what could be done differently.

One participant chose to get the conversation going by sharing that the very fact that we had a group of Community Champions which met every week was in and of itself an extremely good thing. She did point out though that there were no young people on it and that what we therefore needed to do was to organise youth parliaments, forums, and channels where content which they would find interesting could be shared. Most participants agreed, and ideas such as appointing youth ambassadors and working proactively with youth organisations were tabled.

It was then that Rosie (name changed to maintain confidentiality), an elderly Caucasian lady who always showed up for the Community Champions calls along with her cat and with the television running in the background, said that the young people were the ones who had bought into the vaccine conspiracy theories. She went on to add that they were really not abiding by the rules around social distancing, mixing, and face masks. The Moderator stepped in to ask what we might do as senior members of the community.

'Get the police to break up their groups and get them to adhere to the rules,' affirmed Rosie. 'Tell them that they need to help the vulnerable by doing so. I mean, we can't even go near them!'

William (again, name changed), another participant, joined in: 'As a linguist by profession, I endorse good communication. Messaging is very important. What we have now, what we discuss now… this is not going to interest them. We need to push out our messages on online media.'

'If we wait for young people to join this group on their own, we will wait forever,' William continued. 'There is no direct way to reach them. Instead, we have to reach out to trusted elders in their communities.'

Others started to share their views.

'Can we do something with gyms? If they go there, then perhaps we can share leaflets. These are the places where they congregate. I don't really see them sitting down in front of a laptop.'

'Yes, the places they go to makes sense. Barbershops, for example. We need to share bite-sized snippets, videos, and multilingual communications.'

'Target ethnic shops. People will see the messages.'

'Short, simple messages. They have to be spoon fed.'

'The real issue is not the colour of their skin but the language they speak. When we say multilingual, we often do not cover the minority White population. Think of the Polish, for example.'

'And this goes for sign language too. There is a big difference in the signs for the same word between the Somali and British sign languages.'

'People connect on a point of similarity. That is what we need to find.'

The Community Champions versus the Others

Over time, policy and official narratives around the pandemic shifted to focus on vaccines. In preparing for the vaccination drive to commence, the Community Champions turned to how 'conspiracy theories' might be addressed. Yet by positioning such narratives alongside and in conjunction with 'young people' (as separate and distinct from themselves),

there was a foregrounded articulation of the need to address this 'misinformation' by reaching out to their 'trusted elders' in the 'spaces and places' they frequented, and by using 'their languages' whether online or other than English. There was a focus on what the Community Champions were (language, messages, vulnerable, and embodied advocates of wellbeing), and how this was different from these 'other' categories (which, to different degrees, were antithetical). We are reminded at once then (as Cohen tells us) that a community is defined as much by what it is as by what it is not.[19] Over subsequent calls (and as the vaccination drive picked up in the month of December and into the new year), there were exhortations to co-opt leaders of different faiths in the effort to address narratives which were against the vaccine, seeking to thereby effect a cultural translation of the pandemic.

For the public health authorities of the Council (as realised actors of the state), and by extension, therefore, for the members of the Community Champions (as Latouresque actors)[20], information (along with its discourses, negotiations, and resistance) thus emerged as the idiom through which liable relations of community responsibility and notions of wellbeing were constructed.

We also note that where the council might have sought to organise its efforts around what it regarded as a cohesive social unit (in this case, the borough), the residents of the borough themselves along with the Community Champions outlined notions of wellbeing which were rooted in kinship relations as defined by age, culture, language, and ethnicity. In this exploration of differences and similarities, in this *othering* by the Community Champions, we note a mirroring of Heidegger's concept of the *chaliceness* preceding the chalice itself.[21] Whereas Heidegger advanced that technology serves only to reveal the potential of being, in the sense of what already exists and proffers itself for revelation, we think with him and argue that the technologies of information (around the virus, testing, tracing, and the vaccine), manifestly in the reciprocal relationships they engendered, served only to reveal the inherent community differences, representations, and interactions. In the

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[19] Cohen, "The Symbolic Construction,", 21.
[20] Bruno Latour. *Reassembling The Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[21] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology".

zoom/online breakout rooms, the social rubric was recreated, and kinship rearticulated around familiar understandings of culture, food, language, and spaces and places, using the grammar of wellbeing and 'abiding by the rules around social distancing, mixing, and face masks'.[22]

CHAPTER 2: EVOLVING ASSEMBLAGES OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

FRAMING WELLBEING OVER TIME

In the week that a UK grandmother became the first person in the world to get the COVID19 vaccine, describing it as the 'best early birthday present'[23], the Community Champions call opened with the Moderators playing the song *With a little help from my friends* by The Beatles. While the vaccine rollout itself was celebrated as a 'landmark', there were concerns around the vaccine itself, with various 'myths' being circulated, as well as regarding the timelines of the vaccine programme being planned for the borough on the one hand, and the news of increasing case counts as well as strains on the NHS on the other.[24]

Speakers from the country's public health authority joined the call. Data and statistics were provided to underline the gravity of a resurgent pandemic. The answers that were given to participants' questions were not certain, and dependencies and caveats were tabled. Above all, there was an emphasis on testing facilities being ramped up in the borough and on more focused contact tracing. Wellbeing was translated into the semiotics of borough case rates, testing percentages, and infection probabilities. Emblematic of the fluid ontological entanglements of testing, contact tracing, and now the vaccine, a participant asked, 'Will there be a track and trace on whether the people who have been vaccinated are alright?'[25]

By the next week's Community Champions call, the number of COVID19 cases had risen sharply. On the call, this increase was the first point of discussion, although it was qualified by an acknowledgement of increased testing and better contact tracing efforts. The

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[22] Field Notes, 2020.

[23] "Covid-19 vaccine: First Person Receives Pfizer Jab in UK", *BBC News*, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55227325.

[24] Field Notes, 2020.

[25] Field Notes, 2020.

Moderator introduced a quiz in an attempt to lend a much-needed note of levity to the added apprehension around the new, rapidly spreading mutant virus strain. Whereas the previous week's call had been anchored in celebration on account of the commencement of the UK's vaccination programme, the underlying theme this time around was COVID19 testing, and particularly for school-going children, since the increase in case numbers was projected as being concentrated in the age group of 13-17 years. A parallel, unmoderated conversation played out in the chat window. One participant's question on whether it was okay for him not to be tested if he did not want to be was met with incredulity and demands for soul-searching. And when this thread eventually turned to discuss testing for school-going children (for whom testing was being encouraged), a second participant suggested, 'While it is a choice for children not to be tested, it is helpful if they do. It is a responsibility which parents have, to keep people, friends, and family safe.'[26]

In late October and early November however, just over a month and a half ago, it had looked rather different. The council's messaging through its newsletters on wellbeing during the pandemic carried the twin messages of community resilience (as being built through the Community Champions) and state responsibility (as described by police and council officers ensuring COVID19-compliant business and residential behaviour). Some of these messages are reproduced below.

'With the news that Covid-19 cases are increasing again, the number of champions in the borough is also rising and there are now 301 champs in our network, helping to keep everyone informed and up to date on the latest guidance and keep our community safe.'[27]

'Officers from across the council continue to work with police to ensure residents and businesses are complying with Covid-19 regulations - with around 20 council officers deployed across the borough daily.'[28]

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[26] Field Notes, 2020.
[27] Field Notes, 2020.
[28] Field Notes, 2020.

At the same time, these newsletters carried a variety of other articles as well, mirroring what Bonilla and Rosa note about online media, in the manner of its "interdiscursive capacity to lasso accompanying texts and their indexical meanings as part of a frame".[29] In short, and through other content on public consultations for redevelopment, the council's initiatives for preventing Islamophobia, and for supporting mutual aid groups and mental health, as well as providing tips for remaining safe during the upcoming festive season, the twin messages of wellbeing as a resident at the level of both community and the state were immediately normalised in a shared conjunctural understanding.

Yet as the number of cases kept growing, come late November, the council's newsletters sought to highlight not only community but also individual responsibility in the sense of residents being encouraged to share their experiences of having been tested for Covid-19 while adhering to existing protocols. The following two excerpts demonstrate this.

'Please do share any experiences you've had of testing and follow up in the borough – it's important we normalise these programmes as part of our way through the pandemic. There is plenty of testing capacity in the borough and appointments can be made very easily through the national booking system.'[30]

'...hands, face and space along with testing and self-isolation if symptomatic, positive for Covid-19 or having been in contact with someone who goes onto test positive for Covid-19.'[31]

The dos and don'ts of self-isolation, rapid testing being piloted in the borough, spotlight features on some of the Community Champions, as well as maps to show the location of testing sites in and near the borough comprised the attendant text. The newsletters also listed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from Community Champions calls, covering testing, vaccines, and how the council was dealing with those who were 'basically continuing

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[29] Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States", *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 6.

[30] Field Notes, 2020.

[31] Field Notes, 2020.

their lives as usual and not adhering to national lockdown rules'.[32] In short, wellbeing was constructed in and through entanglements of responsibility across the state, the community, and the individual.

Closer to the time when the vaccination programme started in the UK, the newsletters started carrying messages from the mayor, asking that residents continue to exercise caution and abide by current COVID19 protocols. While wellbeing was emphasised as being the individual's responsibility ('Why Wearing a Face Covering Helps: Yours protects them and theirs protects you!'), 'support from the council' was continually reiterated as being easily available.[33] In short, the state was the guardian of wellbeing, with the individual and the community jointly responsible for its realisation.

As the holidays approached, wellbeing began to be defined in a multitude of terms: the Christmas bubble, mental health, loneliness, and wearing face coverings or masks. On the one hand, the responsibility for controlling a mutating virus was being situated in the individual and their kinship circles. There was a simultaneous underlining of both caution and anticipation, manifestly through an urgent translation of wellbeing by the state into liable relations for the individual. This was evidenced from the questions (and statements) posted in the chat window during the last Community Champions call before Christmas, as tabled below.

'Do children count as part of the Christmas bubble or is it only adults?'

'If I am elderly, can relations stay with me over Christmas to look after me?'

'It is vital to remember that despite the Christmas exceptions that the Covid-19 alert level in [...] is now at very high. Everyone must follow the new rules...'

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[32] Field Notes, 2020.
[33] Field Notes, 2020.

'Forming a festive bubble is a personal choice and should be carefully balanced against the increased risk of Covid-19 infection.'

'We are now seeing the number of positive cases rising again, and there are indications that this increase is happening quite quickly'

'The most impactful thing you can do is to avoid any indoor household mixing, beyond the current exemptions, and remember you are safest when you follow hands, face, space.'

'...84 per cent of cases are reached by NHS Test and Trace, and 83 per cent of close contacts – this is higher than previous weeks but is relatively low compared to other London boroughs.'[34]

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF INFORMATION, IN A SOCIAL PANDEMIC

In analysing the Community Champions calls and the council newsletters, we look towards public culture in the sense of 'an arena where other types, forms and domains of culture are encountering, interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways.'[35] Over the months of October, November, and December 2020, we noted a discourse which was continually shifting between testing and tracing, the vaccination programme, increasing case counts, variants, and vaccine efficiency. If earlier in the period, the virus was phenomenologically experienced by those who might not have contracted the disease, in terms of information around testing and contact tracing, as well as lockdown and tier-based restrictions, then over the course of these three months, this information-as-experience also traversed vaccination programmes, a mutant strain, and an array of data and statistics. Here we agree with Desjarlais and Throop and note that "distinctions between subjective and objective aspects of reality, between what is of the mind and of the world, are shaped by the attitude that a social actor takes up toward the world, as well as by the historical and cultural

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[34] Field Notes, 2020.
[35] Appadurai, "Why Public Culture?" (1988): 6.

conditions that inform the values, assumptions, ideals, and norms embedded within it".[36] And individual wellbeing, as an epistemological outcome of these discourses, was thus at once an embodiment of these experiences, shifting and morphing with the pandemic as it waxed and waned, where "uncertainty, ambiguity, and indeterminacy are the norm".[37]

Burgess and Horii tell us that responses to health are often socially determined as opposed to merely being biomedical in nature.[38] Thus, we propose that wellbeing (and responsibility thereof) was not only being defined and redefined by the state but also being embodied and re-embodied by the individual as a Deleuzian assemblage of data, probability, and adherence to rules.[39] Extending the ontology of *becoming* by Deleuze and Guattari, we argue that for the individual, there was equally a *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus, alongside a concomitant phenomenological *becoming*-data-and-information by the community (the borough).[40]

CHAPTER 3: IMAGINING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AS THE EMERGING ONTOLOGY OF WELLBEING

"Resilience fits with a social ontology that urges us to turn from a concern with the outside world to a concern with our own subjectivity, our adaptability, our reflexive understanding, our own risk assessments, our knowledge acquisition and, above all else, our responsible decision- making."[41]

"Individuals, communities, organisations and governance need to show awareness of how to enhance their capacities through networks. Getting this right means taking responsibility for our choices. The resilience approach emphasises how responsibility

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[36] Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop, "Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, (2011): 89.

[37] Desjarlais, "Phenomenological Approaches," (2011): 90.

[38] Adam Burgess and Mitsutoshi Horii, "Risk, Ritual and Health Responsibilisation: Japan's 'safety blanket' of surgical face mask-wearing", *Sociology of Health & Illness* 34, no. 8, (2012): 1185-1187.

[39] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 305-306.

[40] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 278.

[41] Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach", *Resilience* 1, no. 1, (2013): 40.

works through making the right connections. This is a privatised view of the world where the state steps back and allows partnerships to develop between stakeholders and various informed people."[42]

IMAGINARIES OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In early November, the council and the public health authority representatives had facilitated a 'Long Table event' with all Community Champions during a weekly call. This found an elaborate description in the subsequent newsletter. As Champions ourselves, we participated in this session to gain a first-person perspective.

The Champions were asked to share topics beforehand (on e-mail) in the sense of what they wanted to discuss and address 'as if they were at a dinner table'.[43] Of the many ideas which came in, a vote was facilitated during the call, and the Champions chose 'how we can build community resilience in these strange times'.[44] In the subsequent coverage of this event in the council newsletter, it was highlighted that the Champion who had originally submitted the topic had witnessed heightened stress surrounding the disease on account of prevalent conspiracy theories and misinformation. The narrative of 'how we gel as a community so that the right information gets out' entrenched the project of community resilience as one that could bridge the ' information gap between those 'in the know; and those 'not so much'.[45] One Champion translated this narrative in terms of her own lived experience as 'coming to spaces like this [that is, the weekly Champions calls] where you can get nourished so that you can go back out and give as much as before'.[46] Another Champion drew comparisons between flows of food and information, establishing the *placeness* of exchange within the community, saying 'Food is a connection… the supermarket, the farmers market, and the places that are still open and viable are where I'd like to share'.[47]

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[42] Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 43.
[43] Field Notes, 2020.
[44] Field Notes, 2020.
[45] Field Notes, 2020.
[46] Field Notes, 2020.
[47] Field Notes, 2020.

In this manner, the suggestions and ideas that emerged during the Long Table signified the imaginaries of community resilience on the lines of "individual preparedness, making informed decisions, understanding our roles and responsibilities, and showing adaptability to our situation and being able to 'bounce back' should things go wrong".[48]

INFORMATION BUILDS RESILIENCE

Information, as a measure to build resilience, was represented across distinct forms during the Long Table. This included confusing COVID19 news on different media, shares on local resident WhatsApp groups, weekly summaries of meetings to disseminate across networks, and trainings for Champions to have difficult conversations.[49] Interestingly, the stated enablers as well as barriers to information included aspects such as the appreciation for neighbours' support, the need to share information sufficiently quickly, an inability to understand things that were not perceived as plain English, an overload of information, and a fear of integrating with communities on account of the infection, amongst others.[50] The entrenchment of reciprocity and liable relations within the construct of resilience was evident from the Champions believing that it was their responsibility to 'make young people more confident to help others', 'connect more with elderly residents', 'volunteer for befriending and mentoring', and 'as community navigators, enable a top down approach that will facilitate communication and preparedness'.[51] A lone Champion expressed the precarity of her own wellbeing in the midst of this ideation: 'Many of us feel isolated currently and we all need some support'.[52]

RESILIENCE AS RESPONSIBLE WELLBEING

Towards the end of the Long Table, the Champions were 'challenged' to take pledges of 'action to contribute to building community resilience', as a cementing of the narratives of responsibility.

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[48] Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 41.
[49] Field Notes, 2020.
[50] Field Notes, 2020.
[51] Field Notes, 2020.
[52] Field Notes, 2020.

The council newsletter which followed the weekly call was titled 'Community Champions on the rise'. It situated the increase in the number of Champions in the context of the rising number of COVID19 cases. Their role (and intersubjectivity[53]) was established as 'helping to keep everyone informed and up to date on the latest guidance and keep our community safe'.[54] Joseph outlines the resilience approach as one where responsibility works "through making the right connections ... between stakeholders and various informed people".[55] The newsletter indeed outlined that the weekly calls for and with the Champions, with up-to-date and detailed information on various aspects of the pandemic including 'NHS Test and Trace, school settings, flu, financial support and local GP testing', had enabled them to address the issues which the Champions had prioritized.[56] The ontology of information explicitly manifested in a *word cloud* inserted in the newsletter placed a spotlight on words such as *WhatsApp*, *Emails*, *Questions*, *Answers*, *Flyers*, *Chat*, *Share*, *Volunteers*, *Neighbours*, *Online*, and *Local* amongst others[57], as well as the quotations from the Long Table event that reiterated aspects such as information, sharing, and training amongst others.

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[53] Desjarlais, "Phenomenological Approaches," (2011): 88.

[54] Field Notes, 2020.

[55] Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 43.

[56] Field Notes, 2020.

[57] Field Notes, 2020.

CONCLUSION: INFORMATION, LIABLE RELATIONS, AND RECIPROCITY

'And I agree with [name withheld] regarding the fairness of the offer in the UK.'

'At some point the choice for everyone in the UK will be take the vaccine or have your refusal recorded officially and you won't be pestered again.'

'There are only so much time, effort, and resources available to try and persuade people.'

'I agree with [name withheld], as I think that is something that would need looking into… recording choice officially and legally so that any confusion over who has and hasn't been offered would be settled.'

(Excerpt from a chat on the Community Champions WhatsApp Group.)[58]

In his essay titled *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Deleuze quotes Guattari as having "imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighbourhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier" and that "what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position - licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation".[59]

This universal, disruptive modulation of control is anchored in information and enabled by the *homo reciprocans*. The *homo reciprocans* is distinct from the *homo economicus*, with the latter "relentlessly maximizing utility as he or she ambles through life".[60] Instead, and as Bowles and Gintis suggest, the "homo reciprocans is characterized by "strong reciprocity": the willingness to incur personal costs in order to cooperate with others similarly disposed and to punish those who violate group norms".[61] Following this line of

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[58] Field Notes, 2021.
[59] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", *October* 59, Winter, (1992): 7.
[60] Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", 1999.
[61] Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", 1999.

thinking, we are reminded of the participant on a Community Champions call whose query about whether he was within his rights to not get himself tested for COVID19 was met with a mix of incredulity and moral grandstanding.[62]

In our research, we first examined how existing kinship relations as defined by age, culture, language, and ethnicity were foregrounded in online spaces and places, and in the sense of the notions of wellbeing that were articulated by the Community Champions in the borough. Reminded in this manner of Sahlins' "mutualities of being"[63] as comprising the lingua franca for kinship relations, we observe that the *othering* by the Community Champions is but a mirroring of the inherent structural differences and similarities in the offline or physical world. Finally, this stands in contrast to the borough being regarded and addressed as a cohesive and essentialized social unit by the local council.

Next, we reflected on the Community Champions' experiences as the pandemic waxed and waned over the months of October, November, and December 2020. Admittedly, our first epistemological port of call was Foucauldian *governmentality*, as "corresponding to a type of society controlled by apparatuses of security".[64] Yet, as our research suggests, the liable relations we were studying were (and are) in fact constructions of information and the consequent engendering of responsibility and reciprocity along the axis of individual wellbeing. Deleuze writes that "in the societies of control, one is never finished with anything".[65] As a note, therefore, we suggest that the exhortations regarding wellbeing and responsibility in the pandemic are realised and continue to be realised through evolving assemblages of data, information, and probability on the one hand, and testing, tracing, and vaccination on the other. Instead of a dialectic, they are in a relation of *becoming*: manifestly and at once the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus, alongside the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community.[66]

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[62] Field Notes, 2020.

[63] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 10.

[64] Burchell, "The Foucault Effect,", 104.

[65] Deleuze, "Postscript on the," (1992): 5.

[66] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 278.

Finally, as we explored the imaginaries of wellbeing, we noted that while information was a measure to build resilience, resilience in turn came to be advanced by the Champions themselves as the essence of responsible wellbeing. Individual responsibility was enmeshed in the construct of community resilience, and this found resonance in the primacy of reciprocity and liable relations among the Champions. Time and again, they brought forth their responsibility to "make young people more confident to help others", "connect more with elderly residents", "volunteer for befriending and mentoring" and "as community navigators, enable a top down approach that will facilitate communication and preparedness".[67]

We conclude then, that these *homo reciprocans* were (and are) indeed at once the objects and subjects of information.

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[67] Field Notes, 2020.

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