



THE WORLD RESILIENCE SOCIETY

'The desire for security and the fear of insecurity are the same thing. To hold your breath is to lose your breath. A society based on the quest for security is nothing but a breath-retention contest in which everyone is as taut as a drum and as purple as a beet.' (Watts, 1951)

FROM WORLD RISK SOCIETY TO WORLD RESILIENCE SOCIETY

We live in a World Risk Society: we are continuously reminded of risks around us, from the financial risks of our loans and mortgages to climate change. Out of all the possible risks that could have brought society to a standstill, it was the SARS-CoV-2 virus with a mere size of 0.00012 millimetres that did. Similar to many other societal risks, the risks that this virus brings us are surrounded with uncertainties, from the questions that people have asked about the basic data collection to the governmental recommendations about face-masks, herd immunity and quarantine.

Similar to other risks, people seem to hate the uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in this context of uncertainties, some health authorities seem to have decided to transform the reality of uncertainties into imaginary or symbolic certainties, at least in their communications. Unknowns are presented as knowns. This transformation is not extraordinary as, in general, people seem to have the psychological tendency to respond in black-or-white ways to uncertainties, as we have seen in previous chapters. Some people even seem to prefer the certainty of suffering or death over having to live with uncertainties. Individuals may tell themselves and others satisfying stories full of certainties about the pandemic, even though they may be aware that the scientific and political reality beyond these imaginations and symbolic stories is



much more uncertain. The existence of so many uncertainties combined with the human wish for certainties seem to have created opportunities for both well-intending scientists and bad-intending crooks. Like the pharmaceutical company which used the 1918 pandemic to sell carbolic smoke balls, companies seem to be selling their hopes for COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines, even though these have not always been fully developed or tested for their side effects, while governments, for example, need to take over the liability for adverse side effects. Thus, there may be nothing unique about the COVID-19 risks, its existential uncertainties, and our human dislike of these uncertainties. Possibly the difference is the large scale of the denial of uncertainty during a pandemic, and its consequences for the economy and individual physical and psychological health.

The solution for our pandemic crisis of uncertainty may be the creation of new ways to live a meaningful and satisfying life while being realistic about the certainties and uncertainties, and the building of meaningful communities to support each other in coping with our shared and personal certainties and uncertainties. Only this attitude of being realistic about our certainties and uncertainties may help us to transform what sociologists call our 'World Risk Society' into what I call a 'World Resilience Society'. Elsewhere, I have named this World Resilience Society a Meaning-Oriented Society (Vos, 2020), and both terms seem exchangeable, as a sense of meaning in life can give us an intuitive compass, leading us away from meaningless uncertainties into the direction of meaningful opportunities, as we have seen in a previous chapter.

In the next sections, I will ask ten different questions about how the World Risk Society and the World Resilience Society address or could address pandemics. These ten questions follow from the Systematic Pragmatic Phenomenological Approach, which is a systematic and critical way to develop an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon (Vos, 2020, 2020d). In these analyses, I will go beyond the direct observations and systematic research, to give an initial sketch of some broader trends, although some trends will need further elaboration and research. This chapter will finish with questions for health authorities and individuals. The core questions will be: how much uncertainty can you bear? Which meaningless uncertainties could you transform into meaningful opportunities?

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Epidemiologists and virologists predict that there will be more pandemics in future, mainly as a consequence of ecological collapse and global hyper-connectedness (Chapter 4). This also implies that there may be more 'Second

Pandemics' of political, socio-economic and psychological responses to the bio-medical pandemics. Consequently, our world may not be as safe, controllable, and understandable as we may have assumed in the past, and there may be an end to our myth of unlimited economic progress. Instead, we may learn how the world also bears risks, uncertainties, and possible socio-economic decline.

Already more than a decade before COVID-19, the sociologist Ulrich Beck has described our era as the 'World Risk Society', and Zygmunt Bauman called it a 'Liquid Society'. They fundamentally characterised our era as dominated by risks and uncertainties, such as health risks, economic risks, and the risk of climate change. However, the concept of the World Risk Society seems to have been hijacked by Third Way sociologists and politicians such as Anthony Giddens, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, who have made risks into something controllable and manageable via pseudo-neoliberal methods, such as outsourcing research, privatising risks, and privatising national services (Vos, 2020). For instance, their administrations removed researchers from governmental departments, and seemed to ignore research reports calling to prepare for pandemics. Thus, their approach seemed to show the danger of denying risks or shifting of risk management to private players such as pharmaceutical companies who sell a story of perfect control.

Status of our knowledge: We have seen in Chapter 2 that the science of COVID-19 is extraordinary science, with an unclear intertwining of science, governments, global health organisations, and commercial interests. This seems to have led to questions about a lack of preparedness, uncertain data, and uncertainties about the two main strategy options of herd immunity and quarantine. Thus, scientific reality seems to be filled with uncertainties. Of course, when I write 'reality' here, this is a relative term; as fallible human beings with our limited senses and instruments, we may never be able to understand the Ultimate Reality – if there is something like that; we can only have our best guesses about reality. If scientists or government press officers aimed to do justice to Ultimate Reality, they would also have been communicating how many uncertainties there are, and how much we do not know. However, anyone watching the daily briefings from the press rooms in the White House or 10 Downing Street may have only been observing a Platonic shadow show – mere tragi-comedic entertainment or Hollywood drama? – devoid of the reality of uncertainties, human errors, and individual differences? Although this may be an extreme depiction of these press briefings, it seems that the denial of uncertainties has forced press officers into a tango of bending and twisting, giving explanations for the unexplainable, and broadcasting certainty where there is none. The Emperor is naked, but we do not seem to be saying this aloud.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan made a difference between Reality and reality, and he suggested that the latter (reality) is our symbolic and imagined construction of how Reality may look. Symbolisation and imaginations of Reality are nothing extraordinary, as they are part of our daily interactions and communications. However, problems seem to occur when influential individuals structurally communicate that their symbols and imaginations are the sole Reality, that people need to follow their Commandments, and that anyone violating the Law is a risk and thus needs to be quarantined – just like anthropologists wrote about hygiene practices, and how the Thora book of Exodus spoke about the exclusion of ‘the unclean’. Although many governmental recommendations during the pandemic seem sensible given the scientific status quo, the ontological conflation underlying the governmental communication seems to exclude the realistic possibility of doubts and lack of clarity. The more uncertain politicians are, the more they seem to communicate in terms of certainty, ranging from populism and fascism to Corona Capitalism (Vos, 2020). Understandably in response to this conflation, citizens may start to not only doubt the message but also the messenger: they seem to criticise governments and scientists and develop their own Conspiracy Theories. Therefore in several countries, the pandemic seems to have led to an ontological crisis in political legitimacy.

Materialistic and self-oriented types of meaning: We have seen how scientists and governments often seem to look with a biomedical gaze to the pandemic, whereas the subjectively lived experiences of our body and its associated risks transcends this gaze in our everyday daily life. Thus, it seems as if this pandemic reduces the dynamic and complex totality of our subjectively lived experiences of our own body into a single materialistic object, casting out any individual variations and subjectively lived experiences. *But I am more than a potential time bomb of SARS-CoV-2; do not treat me as a soulless object! No, you are not! Wear a face-mask and obey the social distancing rules, or we will lock you up!* Although all government communication may always have some reductionist tendencies – as states need to use generalised communication and may not be able to do justice to each individual citizen – this dehumanised materialistic gaze seems in line with the materialistic focus of neoliberalism and modern neoliberal communism like in China (Vos, 2020).

Neoliberalism is not merely an approach to economics, but also a framework to what citizens may see as meaningful in life. We saw for instance how the British minister Keith Joseph wrote how politicians may need to actively push the general population to accept the materialistic and self-oriented focus of neoliberalism (Vos, 2020). Joseph suggested that any collective experiences

may be used for manipulation of the mindset of citizens, ensuring that they will support neoliberal values. Some critics have hypothesised that in a similar spirit, some of the government approaches to COVID-19 seem to impose a reductionist gaze on materialistic and self-oriented meanings, offering a shock doctrine for preachers of materialism and self-care. We may hypothesise that it is unsurprising that commercial companies frame the pandemic in mere materialistic terms, potentially stimulating a self-oriented competitive spirit of all against each other. The term 'herd immunity' may also be indicative of this dehumanisation and stripping of the individual of their subjectively lived experiences, as the individual – the *Homo Sacer* – may need to be sacrificed for the herd. The argument for nationwide lockdowns seems similarly focused on the biomedical risks and seems to ignore the significant psychological and social side-effects of self-isolation, and thus cast the complex totality of individuals into potential viral vessels and time bombs.

Functionalistic approach: We have seen how materialism seems to go hand in hand with a functionalist approach: COVID-19 is a material thing – albeit of microscopic size – that can and *should* be controlled (is/ought-fallacy?). Individual citizens become part of dehumanised functions – such as the epidemiological SIR-model – which do not do full justice to the social and larger meanings that COVID-19 may have to individuals. There is no such thing as certainty for model-makers: any statistical model inherently involves risks and uncertainties. However, the overall likelihood and variance accounted for by the statistical models may disappear in their dehumanised translation and communication by politicians: *We know how to control this pandemic! We must take these precautionary measures, otherwise we are doomed!* Individual citizens are reduced to functions in the statistical functions of the state, and statistical variation and errors may be dismissed as necessary side effects.

Relationship between individual and society: The chapter on politics brought us to biopolitics, which are the ways how governments govern biological phenomena and the biomedical dimension of citizen life. Biopolitics involves many variations and risks – as, by definition, a population does not have one physical body, but many individual bodies. The question is how governments manage the uncertainties associated with these. We saw how governments have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing their external control and authoritarian measures such as fining anyone who is not self-isolating or who is not wearing a face-mask in public spaces. We also saw how internal control (self-governmentality) was stimulated by appealing to the personal sense of responsibility, guilt, and shame of citizens.

Development over time: Why do individuals obey their governments? Hannah Arendt asked this question in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, with the protagonist, Eichmann, who was responsible for coordinating the trains to concentration camps. Eichmann's life story struck Arendt as an ordinary father and responsible citizen, who thought that he was just following orders, and he claimed that he did not know precisely what happened in the camps. Thus, Arendt concluded that evil could be very banal, existing in tiny decisions in daily life situations, which – if taken on their own – do not seem evil at all. Arendt explained how a line of tiny steps might constitute Evil.

No reasonable moral comparison can be made between an individual coordinating trains to the Final Solution during the Second World War, and individual citizens believing and obeying the demands and recommendations of their health authorities during a pandemic. However, Arendt used Eichmann's case to describe the general societal mechanism of explicitly and implicitly indoctrinating individual citizens, while individuals may let themselves be indoctrinated by not being critical enough. We have, for example, seen how risk-perceptions, mental health and behaviour can be shaped over time by influences from government, scientists, the media, and the pharmaceutical industry. However, we have also seen how individuals can develop their interpretation, independently from whatever governments or media tell them. It seems to be in the small mundane steps of everyday life that individuals may develop their perception and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the underlying question seems to be how critical they are of those influencing them, and of their perceptions and behaviours. However, at the same time, what is the ability of citizens to separate the wheat from the chaff, governmental manipulation from wise advice; for example, how can individuals know whether it is wise to use PPE and go into self-isolation? Ultimately, the question is how practically and morally self-reflexive individual citizens are in their daily life during pandemics. However, we may not have the precise answer to these questions, as we are just facing hypotheses and uncertainties as individual citizens who may be unable to know what is precisely going on beyond the screens of biopolitics.

Who has power over whom: Chapter 3 outlined the inequality of the impact of COVID-19, as is often the case with epidemics. It seems that the pandemic – or even more broadly speaking, the World Risk Society – brings an inequality to the risks that different individuals in society carry, as the most vulnerable seem to bear the largest risks and the most uncertainties. It seems to be the inequality of power relationships that have led to large-scale demonstrations and social disruptions at the end of the pandemic in the most unequal western countries, the USA and UK, as if COVID-19 were the final straw for these demonstrators.

What they seem to be demanding are democracy and equality – or better said: equity of opportunities in society. In contrast, the reconstruction of the societal response to the pandemics in this book has focused on the role of a relatively small group of influencers, mainly key governmental advisors, individual scientists, and pharmaceutical industries, which seems to leave out the voices of the many. Their perceptions and decisions have determined nationwide lockdowns and governmental communication, which has determined the citizens' risk-perception, psychological stress, mental health, and behaviours.

Sense of freedom: The philosopher Esposito has argued that governments have excluded individuals from society during the pandemic. For example, we have seen how 'risky' frontline workers or former patients feel stigmatised. We have also seen how the pandemic has in general led governments to limit the freedom of movement, the freedom of gathering in larger groups, etc. Thus, the uncertainty of risks seems to have brought some experiences of negative freedom, inequality, and powerlessness. In contrast, there has been little or no communication about positive freedoms, such as ways of helping each other during COVID-19, and how to live a meaningful and satisfying life despite the pandemic. This lack may be endemic of neoliberalism, which seems to focus on negative freedom – telling us what *not* to do – instead of positive freedom – facilitating people to do what they genuinely want to do (Vos, 2020).

Existential ground: 'Thou must change, or thou shalt die – or thy neighbour shall!' We could possibly say that rarely have modern societies seen such a large-scale existential campaign by governments. The World Risk Society is infused with existential messages, angst and existential defence mechanisms. Although we may want to think that we are unique, the current pandemic is not unique regarding our collective existential response, for example in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the 7/7 London bombings, or the 2007/8 financial crash. We have always been at risk: these collective traumas have reminded us of our fragility, and in response, we become nationalistic, conformist or populist, and focus on what we think is the most valuable. Although these responses seem understandable, they do not seem to do full justice to the underlying feelings of existential vulnerability, mortality, and loneliness. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have triggered feelings of conservatism, populism, or even outright fascism, almost forgetting the underlying foundations of risks and uncertainties.

Impact on daily life: Living in the World Risk Society seems to be associated with risks and uncertainties that we did not want to know, and while casting these risks and uncertainties away from our consciousness, we seem to be creating mental health problems, low quality of life and poor life satisfaction. Our

mental health seems to be in a collective crisis, and our mental health authorities may not be able to give an efficient response as they may be stuck in their socio-economic-political position (Vos, Roberts & Davies, 2019). Consequently, the standard mental health-care solutions that health services offer may only scratch the surface and help clients to create their own certainties, while leaving out the realistic topics of risks and uncertainties (ibid.).

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Whereas the above-mentioned sociologists such as Ulrich Beck seemed to dominantly focus on the negative sides of risks, we could also explore how we could develop a 'World Resilience Society'. This is a society in which individuals do not see risks only as problems but also as opportunities – both at the same time: a dual attitude (Vos, 2020, 2018, 2014) – and where individuals can live a meaningful and satisfying life despite acknowledging the realistic risks, transforming existential emptiness into space (Vos, 2014). In the following paragraphs, I will fall into a logical is/ought-fallacy from how things are to how things should possibly be: we may restructure economics and politics – and we are already seeing such trends – in such a way that we embrace uncertainties and become more resilient against future shocks while giving a clear black-or-white response after any systematic evidence-based research. This pandemic could give us the opportunity and hope for a Big Reset of our socio-economic and political system (Schwab & Malleret, 2020).

Status of our knowledge: Whereas the World Risk Society seems to have focused on symbolic and imaginary risks to go around Real risks and uncertainties, the World Resilience Society acknowledges – and may even embrace – risks and uncertainties. This means that, throughout their decisions and communications, scientists and governments mention the risks, variations and uncertainties involved; their communication is transparent and facilitates critical public debate. If they present any symbols or imaginings – which is inevitable as we humans seem to desire these – they are explicit about their ontological status: this is our vision, not Reality. Education should include modules to help children, young people, vulnerable individuals – and possibly the general population – to develop critical thinking skills, to differentiate Reality from symbols and imagination.

Types of meaning: Although its starting point is the plurality of perspectives and meanings in society, the World Resilience Society predominantly focuses on social and larger types of meanings (Vos, 2020). This means that social and ethical values, the sense of community and altruism, may predominate

any decisions from governments and health authorities. We do not merely need to limit the biomedical risks of COVID-19, but also the risks of social division, a me-versus-the-rest mentality, mass unemployment and devaluation of employee skills. If we want to control the First – biomedical – Pandemic, we also need to cope with this Second Pandemic of individual and social psychological processes. Ultimately, the question is: what type of society do we want to be? Do we want to be exclusive for healthy able individuals who fit our right psychological and socio-economic framework, or do we want to be inclusive?

General approach: Whereas functionalism – reducing individuals to anonymous variables in a statistical function – is inherent to mathematical-biomedical and neoliberal approaches to COVID-19, a critical-intuitive – or phenomenological – approach determines the World Resilience Society. This approach takes the inherent meaningfulness of individuals as a starting point. This means that government policies should not only do justice to the largest number of individuals as possible but go beyond this, as no groups will be structurally excluded. Variations and uncertainties are acknowledged and explicitly communicated – they are not regarded as a threat or variation to the mean but as opportunities and synergies. This also implies specific strategies and communications to specific communities, particularly those at high risk, such as individuals with a low socio-economic status or black and minority ethnic (BAME) background: the one size of governmental policies does not fit all. Several populist – or semi-fascist – political leaders seem to have rejected national diversity; however, their policies seem divisive and contra-productive, especially when public health is at risk: an epidemic in one specific community can quickly jump onto another community. Inclusive politics may reduce the risks that a local or regional outbreak spirals down into a pandemic. This may require both vertical and horizontal aid strategies from international health organisations such as the WHO.

Relationship between individual and society: Whereas we have seen that a relatively small elite of governmental decision-makers and scientists seem to make the critical decisions and communications regarding public health in the World Risk Society, the World Resilience Society is characterised by a more bottom-up, proactively empowering approach to democracy. This implies the creation of mutual trust between authorities and the public. This is a two-sided process, as the public seems to mistrust authorities, and authorities seem to mistrust the general public in neoliberal countries. Scandinavian countries are an example of relative mutual trust between authorities and public, where authorities trust the common sense of people, for example regarding self-isolating when there

are significant signs or risks, such as any symptoms of COVID-19 or having an underlying vulnerability or being in touch with vulnerable individuals.

The core question is: who carries the principal risks and uncertainties, and what is the role of the state in the context of a less hierarchical, citizen-led approach to governance? How can we share responsibilities with realistic accountability procedures as part of the public dialogue, and not merely in legal terms? How can we learn to build relationships and communities? How can we build mutual trust between citizens in their governments and leaders and vice versa? Which type of dialogue could create this trust? This may require bold new answers. For example, research suggests that countries with female leaders who are quicker in deciding about nationwide lockdowns and who have shown more empathy in their communications and strategies have been more successful in reducing their COVID-19 infection and mortality risks than countries with male leaders who have one-sidedly imposed their COVID-19 measures (Aldrich & Lotito, 2020; Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020). Thus, we may need a bottom-up democratic approach to pandemics, with open interaction between individual citizens and authorities, where a critical attitude is stimulated, and a diversity of voices is heard.

Development over time: Many chapters have described how our perceptions, mental health and behaviours can be shaped by a range of individuals who seem to have their interests primarily at heart. A World Resilience Society offers the teaching of education of critical thinking skills. These skills may help us understand and critically interpret risk communication by authorities, companies, and lobbyists. Whereas the UK – with other Western countries following in its footsteps – seem to have focused their education on market-relevant skills – as the neoliberal minister Keith Joseph argued that teaching critical thinking skills will not give neoliberal parties a majority – the World Resilience Society offers education that includes critical thinking and existential skills (Vos, Roberts & Davies, 2019). Critical pedagogy would include psycho-education about our human wish for certainty, and how sometimes in life we cannot achieve certainty and that we should not fall for false prophets promising certainties in these uncertain periods. On a political level, corruption and nepotism should be fought, including a ban on lobbying by pharmaceutical companies who seem to have significantly influenced prior governmental and inter-governmental decisions regarding pandemics. We have also seen the dangers of science becoming dependent on commercial funding; therefore, non-commercial funding should guarantee the independence of research.

Who has the power over whom: We have seen how in our current World Risk Society, undemocratic processes may have influenced individual perceptions,

mental health and behaviours. In contrast, the World Resilience Society facilitates building bottom-up proactive democracy, mutual trust, empowerment of individuals, the expression of a diversity of voices, and the creation of sharing communities. These are very generic formulations, and it may be easy to give the nod to these sentences; however, the practice of creating a bottom-up participatory democracy can be hard but rewarding work in practice.

Sense of freedom: Isaiah Berlin (1959) differentiated negative freedom from positive freedom. Negative freedom implies that we are not allowed to do certain things – like being in public without a face-mask – whereas positive freedom implies an active stimulation of individual opportunities. The latter includes examples such as ways in which we can stay socially connected during lockdown, how we can democratically contribute to decision-making about the pandemic, what could we do to support each other during this pandemic. We have seen relatively few examples of governmental communication about positive alternatives to how individuals could live a meaningful and satisfying life despite the pandemic.

Existential ground: This book has shown how a lack of existential realism may have determined our collective and individual responses to COVID-19. We often seem to be wanting certainty, while in Reality we are confronted with many uncertainties. As research suggests, there are three ways to cope with this. Either we lower our wish for certainty regarding COVID-19, we lower the uncertainties we perceive (for example, reinterpret the situation by focusing on certain aspects), or we try to find certainty in our generic meanings in life (such as shifting our attention from the existential threats to our worldviews, relationships and activities that we experience as meaningful). The concentration camp survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl called this attitude tragic optimism: while recognising the tragedy that is happening in Reality, remaining optimistic about the opportunity of better times, and actively searching for – and actively creating opportunities of – meaningful moments in life. This is a ‘dual awareness’, which is the simultaneous awareness of our existential Reality as well as our opportunities for meaning, however small these meanings may be in everyday life (Vos, 2014). For media and governments, this implies that not only the existential dangers of the pandemic should be communicated, but also positive opportunities for people to live a meaningful life and support each other in meaningful communities.

Impact on daily life: Whereas the World Risk Society seems to be associated with mental health problems, a low quality of life and life-satisfaction, a World Resilience Society may possibly offer mental well-being, good quality of life and life-satisfaction. This is because meaning-oriented coping skills are stimulated,

which are known to be effective in stimulating a realistic assessment of the situation as well as reasonable behaviour and good mental health (see previous chapter). However, it seems to be a figment of the imagination that life could ever be totally problem-free; all of us will confront inevitable challenges in life, even in a low-risk Walhalla (Vos, Roberts & Davies, 2019). Therefore, it will be essential to help people develop realistic expectations about life and to provide psycho-education about how to cope with life's challenges and uncertainties.

'A new politics of uncertainty must challenge the biopolitical framings and governmentalities of conventional technocratic approaches that define populations or geographic areas as "at risk". Instead, the intersections of uncertainty, vulnerability, precarity and marginalisation must be taken seriously, alongside a commitment to "cognitive justice". This suggests a very different type of approach, centred on shared understandings, the negotiation of outcomes and collective solidarity and mobilisation. It must be rooted in what we have earlier identified as a politics of care and conviviality, rejecting a simple reliance on state protection, standardised welfare and market-based insurance. Asking questions about whose crisis, catastrophe or emergency it is, and how it is experienced, is not a denial of the importance of the event, or the roles for expertise in defining key aspects. Instead, it is a recognition that climate change, disease, earthquakes – or other uncertain events – will look different from the standpoint of those living in conditions of precarity and vulnerability. This means recasting responses, moving away from those that are forged through externally-imposed, expert-led governmentality towards forms of "response-ability", with located capabilities and horizontal accountabilities at the core.(...)

Such explorations of everyday uncertainties and how people negotiate them amid precarious lives start to open up different, and richer, understandings of uncertainty as it relates to disease outbreaks. These understandings involve moves from context to text; from epistemology to ontology; from individual/community perspectives to social relational ones; and from narrow temporalities (the immediate outbreak, the future plan) to multiple ones, as past, present and imagined future dynamics inform each other. Perhaps above all, they suggest that uncertainties are not always amenable to being reduced to risk, and managed and controlled – and that, furthermore, attempts at control may simply spawn further uncertainties. The reality of a multitude of forms of uncertainty, temporalities and experiences does not mean that we should dismiss the urgency of outbreak response, or suggest that efforts to research pathogens, engage with models and predict and indeed prepare for epidemics are not important. Understanding everyday uncertainties and their implications for epidemic preparedness and response must emerge from continuous engagement, as responses to such lived uncertainties can be revealing of local efforts that are of relevance for outbreak preparedness.' (Scoones & Stirling, 2020, pp.17–18,121–2).

POLITICAL ACTIVISM

The big question is: how could the World Risk Society transform into a World Resilience Society? There are clear indications that this transformation is currently happening (e.g. Schwab & Malleret, 2020; Vos, 2020). For example, over previous decades, citizens seem to have become more critical of governments and make their decisions based on what they deem to be inherently meaningful. In this regard, COVID-19 seems to have a Janus-face: on the one hand, some individuals seem to have been following the communications from governments and scientists uncritically, but on the other hand – particularly during lockdown – some individuals have started to reflect on what matters in their own lives and society in general. For example, several countries have seen demonstrations against the supposed authoritarianism and unequal structural policies of their governments, including the Black Lives Matter movement. In the UK and the USA, critical masses of parents have refused to send their children to school after the lockdown, as parents seem to question both the safety and the quality of the education.

A sense of existential urgency is often the crucial spark for an uprising in the population (Engler & Engler, 2018). When individuals feel threatened in their existence, they will be willing to put more at risk to demonstrate and demand justice for their case – or similar cases. As explained in previous chapters, COVID-19 may offer the ultimate existential spark for uprisings. Although some uprisings have been recorded – particularly in the USA – the lack of large-scale uprisings in other countries seems telling – which may be due to a pacifying Corona Life Syndrome.

Let us examine what research tells about existential activism. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to support and participate in social movements when there is a combination of factors (Vos, 2020): deprivation of social and larger types of meaning; if a political campaign has social and larger meanings as campaign aims and methods; if counter-propaganda is well-framed; and if there are sufficient practical resources for the movement. A good example is the uprising of the Black Lives Matter movement at two-thirds of the pandemic, which was initially triggered by the killing of the Black man George Floyd by police officers, and which at a later stage pulled in many others dissatisfied about inequalities in society regarding wealth and health. For example, COVID-19 has revealed structural existential injustices, for example regarding health-care providers, physically vulnerable individuals, socio-economic inequalities, unsupportive education systems. Political campaigns are most likely to be effective when they address a wide range of meanings, particularly

social and larger meanings, when they are not too functionalist, underline existential urgency, psychologically empower activists, and connect the meanings of the campaign with the meanings of powerholders (Vos, 2020).

Furthermore, research suggests that if social movements are to be effective, they may need to focus on the deprivation of social and larger types of meaning, have social and larger meanings as campaign aims, use social and larger meanings as campaign methods, have meaningful propaganda and framing – and be prepared to counter the fake news from the counter-revolution movements – and have sufficient resources. The movement needs to have a positive identity, stating clear political aims and ideological position about each of the ten meaning-oriented perspectives (Vos, 2020). The future will tell us whether and which movements will effectively arise out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HEALTH AUTHORITIES

This book has provided many suggestions for health authorities, such as governmental decision-makers, advisors, and health-care coordinators. Chapter 6 has provided a table with specific recommendations. However, what has not been addressed is a change in attitude. We could approach the pandemic with the perspectives of either the World Risk Society or the World Resilience Society; which approach do governments want to take? Research suggests that the more capitalist, male-dominated and less-empathic governments are – at least in their communications – the higher are their infection and mortality rates for COVID-19 (Aldrich & Lotito, 2020; Martinez, 2020; Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020; Vos, 2020a). Thus, the question is not only about how governments could communicate effectively about COVID-19, but how they should structurally change themselves in such a way that they do not merely contribute to the creation of the pandemic – e.g. via ecological collapse and global traffic – but that they help the creation of a resilient society.

INDIVIDUALS

We have encountered many differences between individuals in how they experience and respond to COVID-19. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to the most effective way to cope as an individual with COVID-19. Chapter 6 has provided a table with suggestions, but these seem to only scratch the surface. The main question is: how much uncertainty do you dare to bear, and how do you want to respond to our complex Reality of certainties *and*

uncertainties? What will you do to make a difference, for yourself and others? These are the questions that will determine our future. The choice is yours.

Table 8.1 Characteristics of World Risk Society and World Resilience Society

Question	Description	World Risk Society	World Resilience Society
Status?	Status of our knowledge	Symbolic and imagined control over symbolic and imagined certainties (need for certainty)	Complex, dynamic reality with management of certainties and uncertainties (acceptance of certainties/uncertainties)
What?	Types of meaning	Materialistic and self-oriented types of meaning	Holistic, focus on social and larger types of meaning
How?	General approach	Functionalistic	Critical-intuitive*
Where?	Relationship between individual and society	External control (authoritarianism) and internal control (self-governmentality); biopolitics	Critical-empathic societal dialogue, acknowledging of risks and uncertainties
When?	Development over time	Risk-perceptions, mental health and behaviour are shaped over time by influences from government, scientists, the media and the pharmaceutical industry, while critical thinking is destimulated	Psycho-education and critical interpretation skills education from young age onwards, fight corruption and nepotism, stimulate independent science
Who?	Who has the power over whom	A small elite of governmental decision-makers and scientists make decisions which influence citizens' risk-perception, psychological stress, mental health, and behaviour	Bottom-up proactive democracy, build trust, empowerment, resilience-building, critical-thinking, diversity of voices, sharing communities
Whose?	Sense of freedom	Negative freedom, inequality, helplessness	Positive freedom, equality, empowerment
Why?	Existential ground	Existential angst and existential defence mechanisms	Existential realism**
Which?	Impact on daily life	Mental health problems, low quality of life, low life satisfaction	Mental well-being, good quality of life and life satisfaction