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Naked society: Global selves in the age of pandemics

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Abstract

This article represents essentially a call for social and
political responsibilities in the age of a pandemic, namely
the on-going global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019.
In articulating his ideas, the author draws on transactional
analysis and psychoanalytically informed reflections on
individual and social processes that are involved in
response to the current global health crisis.

KEYWORDS
cultures, Eric Berne, global self, naked society, Oedipus,
pandemics, politics, script, transactional analysis

Caterina: Daddy, can you turn off the light?

Me: Why?

Caterina: I want to see the dark.

I am writing this article in the second week of March 2020. I live not far from Milan in the north of Italy, which still
has the largest coronavirus outbreak outside China, where the virus apparently originated. Meanwhile I keep
working in Ticino in the southern part of Switzerland where I lead a multidisciplinary Home Treatment team,
looking after people experiencing acute mental health problems. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has just
been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Italy is now in complete lockdown. Communities
worldwide have been seeing a huge increase in the number of cases and, most worryingly, deaths, particularly in the
worst affected countries.

One after another, governments around the world have started implementing extraordinary measures in order
to contain the spread of the coronavirus by closing schools, offices, and museums; canceling sporting events;
suspending gatherings at churches, mosques, temples; shutting restaurants and bars; mandating quarantines and
severely limiting travel and industrial activities. At a more local level, at least in the region of Lombardy where I live,
general hospitals have been struggling to make room for the onslaught of coronavirus patients. I can only imagine
how dramatically the infection will soon be impacting on poor people and communities in low- and middle-income
countries.

Regardless of whether this pandemic is a product of humans or of nature, or both, it is evident that our society has done nearly nothing so far in terms of developing in advance any real global approach to pandemics despite the lessons we should have learned by now from previous outbreaks starting with the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918–1919, and most importantly SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), Ebola, MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome), and other recently discovered infectious diseases (Madhav et al., 2017).

Moreover, despite all the last-minute efforts by scientists, no real treatment can be available in the short-term in order to fight the COVID-19 infection. A vaccine is yet to be developed, as the careful evaluation of its safety and effectiveness on the general population will take time. This virus continues to spread among people. More alarmingly, we are now learning that it can kill healthy adults in addition to elderly people with existing health problems. At the moment the average infected person transmits the disease to two or three others at least. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a real threat not only to the Chinese or Italian people, but also to everyone on Earth (He, Deng, & Li, 2020).

Many of us are now confined at home in order to reduce the contagion, but the virus is entering more communities potentially affecting, if not directly ourselves, our neighbors, colleagues, friends, family members. Television, newspapers, and above all the Internet through social networks on computers, laptops, and smartphones remind us every single minute that we have become the strangers, the enemies, the excluded-secluded in our own country. We have become the biological means of contagion to one another. People have started talking about the current pandemic as if we were at war with no real weapons except our own body. People are strongly encouraged and reminded to wash their hands regularly, to avoid handshakes, to maintain a social distance of at least 1 to 2 m from others, and, most importantly, to 'stay at home!' Health professionals look like soldiers, wearing helmets, masks, gloves, gowns, rubber boots if they have to approach someone who is already infected.

Because of the pandemic we are coming to terms with our most fragile yet vital part of our humanity, to which I refer here in terms of 'naked society', in that psychologically we are most likely to feel like those who are on the verge of a psychotic break-down (see also Mellacqua, 2014, 2021). More specifically, as individuals living in a globalized world, especially if we belong to Western cultures and communities, we are experiencing, perhaps as never before in this serious health emergency, a profound sense of disorientation, ontological insecurity, and increasing terror for our survival. We feel naked, exposed, and vulnerable. These pervasive feelings of existential precariousness and anguish may turn, in the worst scenarios, into impotence, despair, and, even worse, into violence toward others and self-annihilation.

1 | ENTERING THE DARK

A disturbing visitor has settled in our communities, occupying our homes, sitting at our workstations, and participating in government assemblies and political meetings. It has quickly become the real star of TV talk shows and intrudes into our public and private relationships, affecting their fates. But this disturbing visitor has gone further, it has entered our bodies and can lie there undisturbed for days before continuing to spread, covertly, through other bodies and to the detriment of our minds. This visitor has violated one of the assumptions of the ego: that it has boundaries.

In this way, the virus has awakened deep, or rather infantile, ancestral fantasies in many of us, which thus have little to do with the fear, suspicion, panic, sense of insecurity that the media these days want us to believe. The virus is in many, very many, of our bodies. It threatens our lives. Our psychophysical integrity is under attack. On a psychological level as individuals we return to the infantile equation that what is foreign is also hostile. But the enemy is no longer in China nor in Italy. It is already elsewhere. The virus is the inhuman representative of that generic foreigner that we have always feared or excluded, precisely because it does not have a recognizable face. It certainly has a name and a genetic code, but science still knows very little about it. Except that it is invisible; moving

in the air; coming to rest on surfaces; attaching itself to our skin; living in saliva; entering our lungs through our nostrils; and taking away our breath. And above all killing us. The enemy is a ubiquitous killer. It has taken on the features of every individual.

On a purely existential level, the virus, through the activation of the body dimension of our psyche, gives us back the perception of our fragility, of our vulnerability. In the face of such an enemy escape is futile, attack is impossible. Acquiescence, understood as a reaction of freezing before the threat, and denying reality are similarly ineffective and potentially fatal.

This epidemic holds in check even the most powerful collective form of defense against the threat: paranoia. The massive defense of paranoia, through which we channel our energies against an external enemy, quickly collapses. The enemy is everywhere. There are no walls, barriers, nor any militarization of the geopolitical borders capable of stopping this enemy that has become a Common Evil. For these reasons it is not only our individual identity – if indeed there ever was one – that is put in crisis, but also precisely our collective identity as a nation that collapses, implodes on itself in line with a process that recalls the introflexion of the ego in the most pervasive forms of psychotic fragmentation (Mellacqua, 2014). Society is dismembered. The more or less organized groups of workers dissolve. The masses withdraw from the streets. Individuals are confined to their homes in a state of insecurity and without real protection. The implicit assumption is that for many, if not all, home is already a safe place, although we know that much more than we really think, the home environment continues to be the place where many people are real victims of significant trauma such as psychological abuse, neglect, physical violence, and/or sexual abuse. On the other hand, doctors, nurses, health workers, and civil protection forces, and all the people involved in the frontline in this health emergency, are under incredible pressure and are not sufficiently equipped to manage the effects of this epidemic.

The final boundary– also the original one – capable of truly separating us from others and from the external reality seems to be that between life and death. Life and death return to being – in line with Freud's (1961 [1930]) view on Eros and Thanatos, and also taken up by Berne (1969 [1957]) with the ideas of *libido* and *mortido* – the main moderators of the experiences lived both by the individual in his or her inner world and by the whole of humanity in its relationship with the contingent historical reality.

Furthermore, in the era of globalization, the individual facing a pandemic already has an altered perception of space and time. Digital technology, in fact, together with the new ways of communicating offered by the cellphone network are not, as many would like to believe, simple tools at the service of man and therefore the ego, but have undoubtedly modified our cognitive abilities and altered the perception of our deepest Self. Even our being as a body, our *physicality*, has changed to the point where many of us perceive space no longer as a physical distance, and time no longer as waiting for something or someone.

In a recent book, which I find illuminating on the exploration of the nature of this transmissive or 'global self', Christopher Bollas (2018) writes:

> I refer to this new self-formation as transmissive. We use all kinds of objects that transmit infor-mation [...]. We may not like to think of ourselves as equivalent to iPads, smartphones and the like, but we have become extensions of these objects as much as they are extensions of us (p. 51–52).

And then he adds:

> As transmissive selves, our obligation is simply to pass on what we have seen or heard, mimicking the function of the transmitting objects: transmissive discourse is information (of one kind or another) passed on without reflection, analysis or any discernibly unique interest to the self (p. 55).

The result is an increasingly homogenized suffering without real reflexive activity by the self. The words of experts carry the same weight as those of a politician or any journalist. On the Internet disparate theories

proliferate on the origin of the epidemic and how to contain it. These include conspiracy theories that help to amplify an existing climate of despair and helplessness. This disordered mentality does not concern a group or a small community of individuals nor a single nation, but extends in real time across the entire global community which finds itself so folded in on itself, that is, locked away from what is happening outside, and at the same time exposed to a danger that has already entered in.

The individual's existential response to this condition is therefore one of profound loss. Inner life, and therefore also social life, is no longer permeated by fear – understood as fear of something or someone dangerous – but by anguish. Unlike fear, anguish is fear without a specific object (Freud, 1920). Since the object in the case of a pandemic is in fact global, it overlaps with the world itself, with our own limited existence and subsistence. Essentially this pandemic leads us back to the tragic dimension of our existence.

2 | RECONSIDERING OEDIPUS

With the progressive spread of contagion in ever larger areas of my country and in other areas of Europe and the world, the situation of profound bewilderment that we are now experiencing enables us to re-read the tragic myth of Oedipus from a perspective other than the psychoanalytic one.

For the father of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1953 [1900]) the story of Oedipus is the exemplary representation of the inner conflict of every age:

> His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours – because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father (p. 262).

For Freud, therefore, Oedipus makes clear what, when repressed, is rejected with horror, but which is particularly evident in neurotic disorders.

On the other hand, the Greek tragedy of Oedipus can be considered, according to a Jungian perspective, a true archetype in which the underlying suffering of each human is shown, his or her deepest desires such as self-knowledge and individuation as well as the courageous attempts to achieve them. More specifically in relation to the Oedipus myth, Jung (1956 [1912]) portrayed incest as a symbol of spiritual rebirth rather than as a literal desire. The son wishes to return to his mother not so he can copulate with her but so that he can re-enter the womb and emerge again revitalized. From this point of view, father and mother do not only represent themselves, but also carry a series of symbolic values that allude to the forces of the paternal and maternal, the Masculine and the Feminine. In Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, written in the fifth century BC, the Great Mother (understood as maternal principle) is represented by the Sphinx who wants to prevent Oedipus from having access to the benevolent and creative aspect of the Feminine, which is symbolized by the city that is to be governed (Thebes).

This interpretation of the Oedipus myth was later explored by the Jungian psychoanalyst Neumann (1949/1995) according to whom Oedipus is more properly seen as a hero:

> By conquering the Sphinx, Oedipus becomes a hero and dragon slayer, and as such he commits incest with his mother, like every hero. The hero's incest and the conquering of the Sphinx are identical, two sides of the same process. By conquering his terror of the female, by entering into the womb, the abyss, the peril of the unconscious he weds himself triumphantly with the Great Mother who castrates the young men, and with the Sphinx who destroys them. His heroism transforms him into a fully grown male, independent enough to overcome the power of the female and – what is more important – to reproduce a new being in her (pp. 162–163).

But, like every other Greek hero, Oedipus is a tragic hero. Oedipus' tragedy does not lie only in having killed his father and copulated with his mother. Nor in having achieved his own individuation through personal determination. He is also the bearer of an incurable moral suffering that comes from the in-depth knowledge of his past, and which will eventually lead him to blindness by blinding himself.

It is thus possible to reconsider the story of Oedipus according to the methods of transactional analysis. It is precisely the careful re-reading of the events that characterize the history of Oedipus in chronological order, together with the search for their transactional meaning (Berne, 1975 [1972]), that suggests a further investigation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In my view, a transactional analytical inquiry is able to further inform and extend the well-known psychoanalytic version, both Freudian and Jungian, of this myth.

To this end, I will repeat the formulation that Eric Berne offered on the Oedipus tragedy:

> 'Oedipus is an ongoing drama that is actually taking place right now, divided into scenes and acts, with a build-up, a climax, and an ending' (Berne, 1975 [1972], p. 79). More precisely, Berne's view of Oedipus is intimately linked to another important idea of transactional analysis theory, that of life script, that Berne himself developed. In relation to the life script every human being, since birth and throughout his [or her] life course, will be trying to answer, more or less consciously, existential questions such as 'Who am I?' 'Who is the other?' 'What am I to the other?' 'What is the other to me?' 'Where do we come from?' 'Where are we going?' 'What may happen to someone like me?' 'What does this world, nature, mean to us?' (Mellacqua, 2021; chapter 1).

Contrary to Berne's idea that 'culture has very little to do with scripts' (Berne, 1975 [1972]; p. 361), the questions listed above inevitably carry significant cultural, racial, religious, and social-political implications. Moreover, in reviewing the transactional analysis literature, significant contributions about the interplay between culture and scripting can be found only discontinuously since the 1983 issue of the *Transactional Analysis Journal* that was devoted to cultural scripts (Drego, 1983; James, 1983; Krausz, 1983; Porter-Steele & Steele, 1983; Said & Noriega, 1983; White, 1983). This subject was then further developed particularly by Drego (1996, 2005, 2009), James (1994), Mazzetti (2010), Shivanath and Hiremath (2003), and most recently by Cupsa (2018).

I definitely recognize together with several authors – particularly Cornell (2016, 2018), Heathcote (2016), van Beekum (2016), Tudor (2016) – that both individually as transactional analysts and as an international community of people, we still have to properly come to accept that the transactional analysis theory we draw on still lacks a coherent political insight and more comprehensive reflections about the influence of society and politics in shaping and altering the psychological life of individuals, groups, communities, nations.

A proper review of each contribution on such a complex matter is beyond the scope of this paper, as my intention here is to focus more on the story of Oedipus 'from a Martian point of view' (Berne, 1975 [1972] p. 64), that is, by resorting to 'the naivest possible frame of mind for observing Earthly happenings' (p. 492) without preconceptions. Indeed from this point of view I consider the story of Oedipus to be paradigmatic for deepening the transactional analysis understanding of less conscious and potentially more conflictual aspects of the Western societies in which most of us live today.

In this respect, I want to return to probably the most well-known initial contribution in transactional analysis literature after Berne about the theory of cultural scripting, namely the one given by White and White (1975) in which the authors clearly define cultural scripting as 'a mechanism for species survival, enabling most of the individuals to reach a generative stage' (p. 15). I find this definition crucial to the argument I want to make in this article.

Therefore, given the complex nature of the life script as conceived by Berne and the later developments on cultural scripting in transactional analysis, Oedipus can then be considered one of the most representative Greek myths within which one can re-read the existence of the single individual, particularly the one living in the current globalized world, not only from a cross-cultural psychological viewpoint, but also from a more cultural, even subcultural, and social-political perspective.

In this regard, by reviewing the story of Oedipus it is possible to draw a series of further reflections.

1) First, according to the analysis of the Oedipus script it is legitimate to ask: what is the *primus movens*, that is, the origin, of the Oedipus tragedy? What does the Sphinx really ask Oedipus? What is in fact the meaning of the Plague that is raging in Thebes? And from Thebes to Sophocles' Athens, and from Athens to the Western world up to the present day?

At the origin of the Oedipus myth there is a prophecy by the oracle at Delphi advising Laius not to have children by his wife. If he does, his son will kill him and marry Jocasta. The myth tells that, feeling repudiated, Jocasta gets Laius drunk and then seduces him until she has a son by him.

When Oedipus is born, Laius orders his wife Jocasta to kill him. Unable to do this to her own son, Jocasta orders a servant to slay the infant instead. The servant exposes the infant on the pathless hillside of Mount Cithaeron, where he is found and rescued by a shepherd. In other versions, the servant gives the infant to the shepherd. Oedipus is thus left to a fate that, without the intervention of a third party outside the parental couple, would have been premature death. In any case Laius, himself without a father from a very young age, thus abdicates his paternal role, making him responsible, together with his wife, for the abandonment of his infant son Oedipus.

The maternal deception, which according to a process, that is, already symbiotic in origin precludes the paternal desire, together with the paternal insufficiency both before and after the birth of the son, mark the destiny of Oedipus and his city from the beginning. Thebes is thus struck by the plague. Jocasta kills herself. Oedipus follows the fate of those who lose the 'battle' with the Mother, without ever passing the stage of son–child and denying himself a direct relationship with the outside world. The withdrawal from the real world, exemplified first by the self-blinding and then by Oedipus' physical departure from Thebes, together with his [Oedipus'] deeper feeling of alienation constitute the premise for the continuation of his story which is taken up, once again by Sophocles, in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

2) Second, on an analytical level, as the tragedy unfolds, we witness a sort of progressive egoic disorganization on the part of Oedipus. At the same time, Thebes, as a symbol of the entire Western world, risks abandonment, like Oedipus, to the point of falling into a real psychotic chaos where paranoia, then splitting, fragmentation and finally self-destruction and the threat of death reign, exemplified by the plague.

But Oedipus, we must remember, is also the hero who solves the riddle of the Sphinx. In fact, the Sphinx can be understood as the Nature that governs, with its law of death, a world in which there is – as yet – no real generative responsibility nor a regulatory paternal principle. At this level of analysis, the story of Oedipus is therefore the story of a man looking for a new paternal principle in order to restore order and well-being in his own city. In these terms, Oedipus' inner experience partly recalls that of Telemachus, who goes in search of his father Ulysses so that the latter can restore order to his home that has been left in the hands of the Proci.

3) Third, each person's identification with Oedipus allows us to re-discover the importance of the individual's contribution for the Good of the community. And conversely the protective, or destructive, role of the community in taking care of each individual, whether man, woman, child.

The knowledge of our own limits thus leads to the knowledge of the limits of our own fathers and mothers, essentially those who preceded us and/or still exceed us in authority, power, and responsibility. Through participation in the Oedipus drama, every man comes to terms with his own vulnerability and recognizes his insufficiency as an individual against the inevitability of death.

3) Ultimately, there is yet another angle from which to look at the Oedipus story. And it is what could be termed socio-political. It is important in this regard to remember that Sophocles, as an artist in ancient Greece, is perforce a man who is involved in politics. And for this reason the protagonist of his tragedy is not just a man, but the whole city, and in particular Athens and with it, by extension, the Western world.

As rulers of Thebes, Laius and Jocasta, by abandoning their son, condemn him to death. The law, which Laius and Jocasta represent, did not take care of their son. Now Thebes is dying. The globalized (pro-)Western world is dying.

As descendants of Laius and Oedipus we have also colluded with evil within a democratic system, itself a child of Greek democratic thought, regulated by laws. There have been laws that wanted blacks to be slaves; the Jews to be killed; severely mentally ill patients to be lobotomized; gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people to be persecuted. No law has prevented thousands of people from dying in the intentional process of migrating toward a country different from their country of residence; children and innocents from dying of hunger and famine; the gap between rich and poor continuing to widen. No law has seriously prevented any of the wars of the past century. No law has effectively and continuously combated air and sea pollution, the melting of the glaciers, and so on. How many unwritten laws or, to use a transactional analytical interpretation once again, how many socio-cultural and political scripts continue to condition the history and fate of humanity. Legality, even in conditions of supposed democracy, rages alongside inequality. The world, even that of the so-called more advanced and globalized civilization, risks causing suffering and death for an incalculable number of its citizens.

The answer to the riddle of the Sphinx, that is, the riddle of Evil, which will enable us to liberate the city of Thebes, that is our cities, from the siege of this monster is therefore man. Ultimately man with his intelligence continues to be the most effective answer to the riddle of evil. In other words, the riddle of evil suggests that we focus our considerations on what man, both as an individual and as a citizen of a larger community, experiences directly: responsibility, particularly understood as both individual and social responsibility. In the words of Cornell (2018) in one of his recent painfully touching papers: 'More than anything else, real change comes through active engagement in the real world doing things' (p. 108).

In this way, the Oedipus myth shows us how the drama of man, at least of the man who belongs to Western culture and society, becomes simultaneously and inevitably an ethical and political question, in the sense given by the etymology of both these words – *ethos* and *polis* – and that we could translate as the moral respect and concrete care for both single individuals and the larger communities in which they live.

In conclusion there is only one way, if we want to save Thebes, if we want to question the Sphinx and thus fight the Plague that evokes the monstrous figure of the Sphinx. This path is called awareness of the self, of 'others-around-us' and, more particularly, of 'others-within-us'. In other words even psychology, especially psychology with a psychodynamic focus, of which transactional analysis is undoubtedly a worthy representative, cannot ignore an active commitment in cultural, social, and political spheres.

3 | NOT WITHOUT THE OTHERS

This pandemic has forced us to stop, pause, disconnect for a significant period from our perpetual connection to the media, Internet, social networks in particular, to which we ourselves have become an appendix, or a dysfunctional extension. The pandemic has temporarily thwarted the assertion at all costs of our narcissistic individuality that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp and so on have hitherto allowed us to foster. The virus is currently the real star of the media scene.

This pandemic has silenced the streets, offices, churches, temples; it shows us the emptiness of the squares, railway stations, subways, airports that we used to fill compulsively without asking ourselves where we were really going, without recognizing who we are for each other; without thinking about what drives us to do the work we do, what kind of relationships we seek, how we use money and the material, cultural, and economic products we make,

why we have become increasingly obsessed with a continual demand for security, how we want this world to be in the future. An as yet unspecified number of people have lost their jobs, many others are struggling financially or not finding, rather surprisingly, any real relational support from their families or usual friends.

On an individual level, the pandemic reminds us that there is a physical distance between people; that the connection we find on the Internet is neither sufficient nor preparatory to knowing the inner experience and the true motivations of others; that a certain distance is thus necessary to prepare us for an intimate encounter with others; that looking into each others' eyes is the primary prerequisite for seeing other people, recognizing their existence, recognizing ourselves.

In this regard, in the opening lines of *What do you say after you say hello?*, Berne (1975 [1972]) indicated in laconic style how 'to say "hello" rightly is to see the other person, to be aware of him as a phenomenon, to happen to him and to be ready for him to happen to you' (p. 22). As if this were not enough, the founder of transactional analysis further proposed how as the basis for the psychophysical integrity of a human being, and even their survival, there is a *sensation hunger*:

> Most people have a hunger for human contact, at least of sight and sound, and in most cases also for touch or stroking. … Such contact may actually make the difference between physical and mental health or breakdown, and even between life and death (Berne, 1970, p. 190).

The current pandemic reminds us that deep down we miss handshakes and we miss the other just as we miss Nature. It reminds us of how inhuman we can be in our relationships with others, and how much humanity we need to be and feel alive. We have not only traded a little happiness for a little security (Freud, 1961 [1930]) but we have mistaken freedom for a property of the ego, or for a sort of 'private affair'. In this way, we have separated individual freedom from solidarity, making the serious mistake of believing that man can be autonomous in the sense of being able to suffice for himself.

It follows that, among Berne's (1970) various conceptions of autonomy, the one that continues to have relevance, if only for the provocative style with which he expressed it, is undoubtedly the following:

> In order to break away from such script programs, he must stop and think. But he cannot think about this programming unless he first gives up the illusion of autonomy. He must realize that he has not been up to now the free agent he likes to imagine he is, but rather the puppet of some Destiny from generations ago. Few people have the courage or the elasticity to turn around and stare down the monkeys on their backs, and the older they get, the stiffer their necks become (p. 178).

The pandemic we are experiencing unequivocally shows us that in the face of suffering we are not all equipped in the same way to face it, welcome it, overcome it. Many of us have succumbed without receiving the necessary help that an 'advanced' civilization like ours should guarantee. Freedom, democracy, inclusion are empty words without an international government and policy that is shared and actualizable by several countries, especially those most endowed with economic and technical-scientific resources, to safeguard the interests of all communities, especially those most disadvantaged and poor.

This pandemic, which was in fact foreseen (Gates, 2015, 2018), as well as even being announced in November 2019 by experts who were involved at the time in a pandemic simulation exercise at the John Hopkins University Center for Health security (https://hub.jhu.edu/2019/11/06/event-201-health-security/), clearly demonstrates that we are nowhere near prepared for global health crises such as pandemics. In other words, this means that everyone's health is not safe. From this, at least from this, perspective, globalization has clearly failed.

This pandemic forces us to ask ourselves whether we really want to contain the coming failures of the same kind and avoid future and potentially more disastrous ones. On a deeper level it forces us all to reconsider the meaning of life, to think again about the well-being of the individual and of the people in various groups such as families, work teams, local communities, nations, and countries.

In this critical period of our lives the following words by Berne (1947) – before the theory of transactional analysis itself later became depoliticized – have never sounded so much like a strong call to our international community of transactional analysts to mature not only as professionals but also as citizens who are more responsibly involved in political and social affairs of global interest:

> Nowadays it is the duty of every citizen to interest himself in world events, lest they overwhelm him and all his fellow citizens. …. It is no longer wise for scientists to refrain from expressing strong opinions and bringing strong influence to bear in a vigorous attempt to change the trend of history …. Psychiatrists [and not only them] … should and must concern themselves with political affairs (Berne, p. 292).

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The specific physical suffering for which this pandemic is responsible globally reminds us that – regardless of our ethnicity, sex, culture, religious belief, political orientation, socio-economic condition – the first act of a human being at birth is certainly not cry but to breathe. We are also reminded that coming to life as human beings, since the beginning of our intrauterine life, is an act of a small group of reference others, that is, our family members, who are also the very first representatives of the society and country we are born and live in.

Unfortunately in my country, as I conclude this article, the time for tears has already come for those who are gone without many having the opportunity to give the last farewell to a loved one who has died. But I want to hope that our time of quarantine allows us to make a change in our life starting from our homes, from our families who are more or less struggling, from our communities that are more or less traumatized due to other recent or contemporary events than that of the pandemic. I want to hope that the historical time we are going through now is the best opportunity to responsibly implement, in the not too distant future, those socio-cultural, ethical, political, and economic changes that we urgently need in the interest of the well-being of the individual and of that one global community that we call the World to which we all rightfully belong as human beings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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