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Ordinary lives, extraordinary times. Margaret Atwood explained in a TV interview the matrix in which she situates the stirring and thought-provoking dystopias she has shared with us. There are ordinary and extraordinary people, and there are ordinary and extraordinary times, she says. She writes about ordinary people in extraordinary times. The resemblance of this match between ordinary people (biographies) and extraordinary times (societies) with the current pandemic is overpowering. The pandemic is developing at unequal epidemiological speeds according to countries and their reactions, societies or populations; or in de-standardised political paces; and to different informational stereophonic sounds depending on what the right and left hear, and the ability to listen to facts, if at all. Atwood's aptitude for imagining the unthinkable is noteworthy. So is her ability to understand how social nature, in its individual and collective expressions, can adapt, conform and (yes, 'and', not 'or') resist a dystopian context. This kind of imagination and sensibility should be, perhaps more than ever before, a public ambition of sociology. Her marked inventiveness and keen perceptiveness are surely attractive to those interested in identifying the long-run longitudinal sequence and coherence of life events. One of the reasons is that this pandemic and its effects disrupt events, their meaningful interrelation and their understanding. The pandemic has consequences at sociological and analytical levels. As such, it is undebatable that the pandemic pokes the 'sociological bear' in each individual (i.e. brings out the sociological critical approach in each of us), and that it retunes the sociologist's mindset, concerns, commitment and imagination. What is, however, much more debatable is when, how and what to do with this *sociological inquietude*.

Society on hi-definition mode. Unlike Atwood, my attention is directed at ordinary people in ordinary times. Like many others, I am interested in, and make the point of, studying ordinary individuals, the 'middle class', the 'majority', the 'common people', the singular 'black boxes' of society, only to allow myself to be captivated by each one in terms of their uniqueness, singularity and individuality, and by the way all these specificities inherently co-exist with patterns and trends of social change, and with societal organisation. Like many others, I make the point of studying *ordinary times* because I engage with Goodwin and O'Connor's [1] advice to escape the 'fetishism of the present'. Particular *times* may seem extra-ordinary, perhaps just because they are taken out of their wider window of observation. They may seem extraordinary, but this is because they suffer from recurrent lack of comparison. Perhaps they seem extraordinary because we, individuals that happen also to be sociologists, are perhaps not paying enough attention to the social world beyond the single individual, or groups of individuals, that we study, and beyond the topics that interest us, beyond our own survival in a hyper-specialised academia. In the past, I tended to be weary of grand narratives and theoretical generalisation resulting from essayistic pieces. Today, I reflect if I should revise some of my objections.

This *Sociology of the Ordinary Life Course*, as I prefer to call it, has been my longstanding antidote to a-critical affiliations with individualisation theories: that is, to theses that conceal structure by amplifying the effects of individual agency; to dissertations that overstate individual resilience and overshadow *meso* and *macro* contexts; and to the *epistemological fallacies of late modernity*, which Furlong and Cartmel [2] so articulately alerted us to some time ago. So has the 'ordinary' failed me? Surely one can argue that there is nothing 'ordinary' about what we are collectively – but in a socially stratified way – living. Each one of us feels extra-ordinary. So are the efforts being made to confine each one of us to certain spaces, and, perhaps even more so, so too are the sacrifices to maintain *unsafe* social interactions aiming at the survival of others. Lives are caricatures, patterns are exaggerated. No, the 'ordinary' has not failed me. It still provides ample material to achieve my analytical purposes and to support my arguments. But right now, society is in a *hi-definition mode*. These are not 'new societies' we see in the news, and this is not something disentangled from our lifestyles. This is not a virus brought to us from outer space. This, the epidemiological and humanitarian phenomenon we are facing, is a manifestation, a consequence, of the existing and longstanding social organisation of human life.

The *hi-definition mode* allows one to see how 'ordinary' people trust institutions, how their occupations and classes stratify the pandemic experience, and how inter-generational relations dynamically change their content and format. It intensifies and clarifies inequalities and *ideal-typifies* entire states, communities, and territories. It also uncovers the backstage of political decision-making processes, it inevitably contributes to the statistical literacy of the population, and it massifies the intergenerational uses of technology. It produces numerous changes in a short period of time. True. But, in my view, and perhaps more importantly, this *hi-definition mode* illuminates what was earlier obscured; it enhances, focuses and defines many of the social dynamics that were too trivial, foggy and that were hard to see or to deal with, measure or analyse, understand or demonstrate. This *hi-definition mode* provides clarity to 'ordinary' lives and social relations, as well as societies.

For a life course researcher such as myself, this *hi-definition mode* can shed new light on how ordinary people strategically adapt to new or more enhanced realities, and how they reorient their linked lives. Here I am referring to one of the most neglected life-course principle: *Linked Lives*. *Linked Lives* can be summed up in the idea that 'each generation is bound to fateful decisions and events in the other's life course' [3], an idea that is perhaps more conscious than ever in everyone's minds. This principle reminds us of the importance to understand chains (not only of contamination) but of support, of interaction, of well-being, of conditions of existence, their changes over the life course and in the presence of social events (at the individual, meso or macro level). Contamination also has a sociological meaning. With this analytical principle in mind, we have much to understand anew. What a terrible opportunity to do so. This is just one of the many examples of how we should be very careful in rushing to reinvent sociology. We perhaps should first reconsider concepts and instruments that enable us to analyse social life in this *hi-definition mode*. The sociological understanding of society is continuous and cumulative, as any body of knowledge is. It is this scientific continuity, while allowing us to be mesmerised by how much there is still to understand about human social nature at a planetary level, that will prepare sociologists to analyse (this) social change.

Sociological inquietude. As an ordinary sociologist and individual, I seem to implode with reflexivity every two or three days in the last month or so, only to pick up the pieces and restart the whole process again, if insomnia permits, in the morning. I feel restless with concerns and preoccupations with the social world and with the planet, fearless about protecting loved ones and others, truthful to Elias' "society of the individuals" and to WHO's recommendations. But there is also an uncut *sociological inquietude*. Nurturing this *inquietude* may help us to choose information over panic, and to choose actively to monitor inequalities and injustices, over being a bystander of the pandemic. Nurturing this *inquietude* in these complex circumstances, in which time has simultaneously stopped and accelerated, is, in my view, essential to renew a compromise with a slow, consolidated, comprehensive and systematic sociological analysis. There will not be a *Eureka* moment in understanding how *lives are linked*, and how they *strategically adapt* to each other and to historical and worldwide events, such as this pandemic.

Like lava, empirical *data* is now too hot and uncontrollable for we sociologists to clearly identify shapes and patterns of social change, in worldviews and social behaviour. It takes time. It perhaps *should* take time. And while time – and other resources – is being taken from everyone's daily lives, while we try to follow 'test, test, test' recommendations, let us all 'register, register, register' memories of this overwhelming historical moment. Memories of how we feel, how we persevered, how we communicated, how we grieved, how we adapted. Of how we changed, and of how we are changing. Sociologists need to be patient – a counter-intuitive but necessary patience. But they need to accept their *inquietude*, and to be ready to put it to use.

Cá dentro inquietação, inquietação. É só inquietação, inquietação.

Porquê, não sei. Porquê, não sei. Porquê, não sei ainda.

Há sempre qualquer coisa que está p'ra acontecer, qualquer coisa que eu devia perceber.

Porquê, não sei. Porquê, não sei. Porquê, não sei ainda.

José Mário Branco, *Inquietação* (Ser Solidário, 1982).

References

[1] Goodwin, J., & O'Connor, H. (2015). A critical reassessment of the 'complexity' orthodoxy. Lessons from existing data and 'youth' legacy studies. In Peter Kelly, & Annelies Kamp (Eds.), *Critical youth studies for the 21st century* (pp. 28–52). Leiden: Brill.

[2] Furlong, Andy and Fred Cartmel (2007 [1997]), *Young People and Social Change*, New York, Open University Press.

[3] Elder, Glen (1994), *Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course*, p. 6.

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