Introduction: Lockdown and the intimate

Sunčana Laketa ⓘD
University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Banu Gökarıksel
University of North Carolina, USA

Sara Fregonese ⓘD
University of Birmingham, UK

Abstract

The lockdowns imposed upon cities, regions, and countries as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic are extraordinary state-sanctioned spatial interventions, both in terms of scale and scope. However, rather than a time-delimited event nor an exceptional circumstance of a temporary crisis, the pandemic lockdown was entangled with long-standing and on-going intimate and embodied histories of political violence, upheaval, militarization, displacement and dispossession. Be it as a result of war, terrorism, natural disaster, or pandemic – lockdown is more than an intervention in physical space and infra-structure alone. It is also an intervention that mobilizes, and often relies on, the sphere of the intimate along different and often unequal geographies of vulnerability. In this Theme Issue, we build on feminist geopolitics and feminist political geography to examine the intimacies of lockdown, seen through the experiences of refugees, migrants, low-income residents, as well as within the contexts of war and terrorism. Here, the politics of embodiment, domesticity and affectivity is central for understanding how lockdowns actively shape and are shaped by intimate geographies, thus advancing the theorization of the lockdown more broadly. The contributions to this Theme Issue gather around the following questions: how does the spatial politics of lockdown mobilize the sphere of the intimate? More broadly, how does the intimate help forge possibilities and places of counter-narratives of solidarity, shared vulnerabilities and care in contrast to renewed militarization, rising authoritarianism, violence, and the expanding spatialities of confinement in everyday life?

Keywords

Feminist geography, affect, domesticity, confinement, violence

The lockdowns imposed upon cities, regions, and countries as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic are extraordinary state-sanctioned spatial interventions, both in terms of scale and scope.

Corresponding author:
Sunčana Laketa, Institute of Geography, Université de Neuchâtel, Espace Tilo-Frey 1, Neuchatel 2000, Switzerland.
Email: suncana.laketa@gmx.ch

However, these are not unprecedented security measures. Rather, they are a technology of governance for managing state-defined notions of threat, and have longer political histories that span domestic safety, public order, health and even warfare. Political leaders have used lockdowns to regulate population movement and gatherings for a variety of reasons. Lockdowns have been imposed during wars to protect the public from air raids and to ration resources at times of national emergency. They have been historically implemented to control protests or to suppress community tensions, often targeting specific populations based on age, class and race or ethnicity (Arnold-Forster and Gainty, 2022). They have been imposed after a military operation or a coup-d'état to suppress dissent, to easily locate those to be arrested, and to impose political authority and military control over territory. Lockdowns are also routinely implemented, for various purposes, in prisons, hospitals, neighborhoods, universities and schools and a host of interdisciplinary literature on carceral spatialities and imprisonment has studied the historical and expanding entanglements between enforced containment, social control, and infectious diseases in contemporary daily life (Schliehe et al., 2022; Parenti, 2000; Sudbury, 2005).

This Theme Issue builds on and develops this literature by framing lockdown as neither a time-delimited event nor an exceptional circumstance of a temporary crisis. Rather, this issue traces the way the pandemic lockdown is entangled with long-standing and on-going intimate and embodied histories of political violence, upheaval, militarization, displacement and dispossession. The issue engages with lockdown during, but also prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, seen through the experiences of refugees, migrants, low-income residents, as well as within the contexts of war and terrorism.

It begins by linking the governing technologies of lockdown to the powers of contemporary neoliberal states that rest on the growing practices of containment, removal, and detention, thus contributing to the theorization of the lockdown more broadly. The main argument is that – be it as a result of war, terrorism, natural disaster, or pandemic – lockdown is more than an intervention in physical space and infrastructure alone. It is also an intervention that mobilizes, and often relies on, the sphere of the intimate along different and often unequal geographies of vulnerability. The lockdown as a form of an intimate technology of government is most clearly visible within the spaces of the home during the pandemic (Blunt et al., 2022; Dowling and Blunt, 2022), linking the domestic, intimate and the political. As governments called on people to stay home as a form of civic duty, they mobilized the spaces of the domestic and the intimate against the pandemic. Analysing the lockdown is therefore crucial to understanding the intimate political geographies of the pandemic response. The contributions to this Theme Issue gather around the following questions: how does the spatial politics of lockdown mobilize the sphere of the intimate? More broadly, how does the intimate help forge possibilities and places of counter-narratives of solidarity, shared vulnerabilities and care in contrast to renewed militarization, rising authoritarianism, violence, and the expanding spatialities of confinement in everyday life?

Feminist geopolitical approaches to the pandemic

In focusing on the intimate as a key site of politics and geopolitics, and on lockdown as a form of intimate (geo)politics, we build on the work of feminist geographers who have analyzed bodies, emotions, domestic spaces, and everyday life as crucial to power relations and inequalities and the making of territory, borders, state, and the nation (Dixon and Marston, 2011; Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Pain, 2015; Smith, 2020; Staeheli et al., 2004).

The following pages place the pandemic response into a conversation with feminist literatures on the relationship between the intimate and the geopolitical, for three main reasons: (a) the intimate geopolitics analytic enables connecting everyday fears and experiences of insecurity and vulnerability to globalized accounts of health, risk and emergency governance (Laketa, 2021; Pain and Staeheli, 2014; Pratt and Rosner, 2006; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006); (b) this approach emphasizes

the corporeal and the affective dimensions of the geopolitical in ways that show how these relations of power are not merely imposed upon intimate lives, experiences and practices, but rather how the sphere of the intimate plays an active role in the very construction of the geopolitical (Barabantseva et al., 2021; Berlant, 1998); and (c) it enables extending the spatial politics of the lockdown beyond the governing of the health crisis and into addressing their entanglements with embodied histories and racialized, gendered and classed experiences of immobility and confinement (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2017; Gökarıksel and Secor, 2020; Sudbury, 2005; Tyerman, 2021). Finally, the intimate geographies of lockdown uncover the lived, felt, and experienced realities of places, thus connecting and grounding accounts of global health (Ingram, 2008) and everyday struggles for well-being (Butler, 2022).

The articles presented here convene to theorizing the intimate geographies of lockdown in a variety of settings. Rather than accounting for variation across states and regions in imposing and managing COVID-19 lockdowns, the Theme Issue aims to highlight the spatial politics of lockdown as a highly uneven process as it impacts different communities in different ways. As such, the contributions center on marginal communities and sites and multifaceted violent geographies of the contemporary crisis.

The work by Torres et al. sets the stage for uncovering the genealogies of lockdowns as long-standing technologies for governing the asylum seekers forced to wait at the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. Here, the pandemic lockdown forms part of the continuum of state governing practices and policy changes directed at managing claims to asylum on the US-Mexico border. Starting with the application of quotas in 2018, and other policy changes meant to deter refugees from seeking asylum in the US, people have been forced to wait for months in order to lay their legal claims to asylum under international law. These changes have had a devastating impact predominantly on refugee women and children, who found themselves locked-in-place at the violent borderlands for extended periods of time, further exposed to conditions of violence, exploitation, threat, and uncertainty. The closing down of the border as part of the pandemic lockdown marks a continuation of the anti-asylum public policies of containment, entrenching the locked-in-place conditions to which women and children migrants have been long subjected to.

Laketa and Fregonese continue to explore the way the pandemic lockdowns are entangled with counter-terrorism lockdowns in European cities. Here, framing of the pandemic response as a war against the virus involved an implementation of a series of military and state security practices and technologies of eliminating threat. Both terrorist and microbial threat are entangled in the on-going normalization and domestication of militarism, war-like values and practices in urban space. The "us versus them" mentality of warfare shaped the responses and the solutions to the pandemic, centered on the spatial technologies of the lockdown. The militarism underpinning those responses rests on colonial and racial logics of governing, in ways that sustain and exacerbate existing in-equalities. As a result, rather than enabling safety, the political geographies of the pandemic response exposed to further injury and harm those who are most vulnerable – low-income, gendered, and racialized communities.

At the same time as exacerbating vulnerabilities and exposure to violence, the experience of confinement presented an opportunity to re-configure and re-appropriate conditions of on-going violence. Hagan provides an extraordinary account of circumventing immobility at the Calais border crossing between France and the UK. The Calais border has for years been the epitome of violent policing of migration. Women in Calais form part of the often invisible, yet highly vulnerable group, exposed to the multiple violences that traverse these spaces, from deportation, police abuse, rape, and exploitation. Under these conditions, many women find themselves waiting for months to ensure safe passage to the UK. However, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the women in Calais were forced together in shelters, away from their male peers. The situation of mutual, albeit forced, female co-habitation became an opportunity to share stories, experiences, and support

among precarious and marginalized, yet differently positioned, migrant women. The experience of living together provided a space to build new allegiances and form collectivities based on strategic intersectionality, that, at least temporarily, suspended the violent borderlands as a male dominated space. Hagan's work thus highlights how confinement and waiting are actively appropriated by migrant women in order to negotiate and ascertain a safe border passage.

Further contributions to the Theme Issue foreground the feminist ethics of care, where the intimacies of the lockdown provided a space for re-thinking how we live in the world, with one another, with the environment and the infrastructures, and with the socio-technical systems. The work of Muñoz et al gives an account of the struggles faced by a public housing community in Denver, US to secure access to needs and resources in the absence of state support. The poor and minority neighborhood has been for years subjected to infrastructural violence, neglect, decay as well as the neoliberal solutions to the housing crisis. The lockdown deepened the reliance on informal infrastructures of care, urging innovative and collective responses based on interdependency and vulnerability in ways that resist neoliberal structures and work towards community sustainability and justice.

Saindon's article addresses the changing relationships between people and socio-technical systems, such as digital social media platforms, in times of turbulent social and political transformations wrought by the pandemic lockdowns together with the Black Lives Matter movement, in Kentucky, US. Focusing on the practice of "doomscrolling", the work investigates digital well-being, and digitally mediated practices of care, brought about through relations of proximity and intimacy. For Saindon, the precarious moment of death, anxiety, and violence that was created by the pandemic loss of life and racial killings in the US, gave rise to increasing awareness of the damaging relations between users and their digital devices. The situation created an opportunity to contest the normative, neoliberal, and individualized solutions to digital health and well-being, and re-think the politics of self-care "within, and for, the sociotechnical systems which bind us together" (2).

Domestic geopolitics of lockdown

In understanding the intimate politics of the lockdown, ideas of home and domesticity hold relevance. The lockdown, as a stay-at-home order, relies on construction of the domestic sphere as a haven from the dangers prevalent in the public sphere. The patriarchal and gendered construction of home as a refuge was further entrenched in the pandemic response (Mitropoulos, 2020) – and also brought into stark relief the everyday domestic terror experienced by victims of domestic violence (Pain, 2014). The home as safety assumption overlooks the situations of domestic violence to which women and children are subjected to, untenable access to housing for migrant, poor and homeless people, and the gapping class and gendered differences in the ability to stay home and work (Burrell et al., 2021; Ho and Maddrell, 2021).

Several contributions in the Theme Issue foreground the home as a complex site of the geopolitics of the lockdown. For Laketa and Fregonese the geopolitics of home is reconfigured through the terrorism/pandemic nexus as a framework of emergency governing. The home becomes a space of containment and detention, governed by the spatio-temporal logic of pre-emption. Moreover, in Hagan's work the effect of building a carceral space around forced domesticity is transformed into an opportunity to challenge the multiple immobilities faced by migrant women. The intimacies of co-habitation created a rupture within the violent and masculinist borderland that challenged existing gendered, patriarchal, and racial/national norms. Muñoz et al's work continues to emphasize the significance of home as not simply a location or a passive infrastructure of neglect within the housing crisis, but also as an intimate site that extends beyond the walls into streets and neighborhoods and is central in enabling collective forms of care based on ideas of interdependency and relationality.

Lockdown and affective geographies

Affect and emotions of fear, anxiety, vulnerability, and uncertainty became an intimate and embodied register through which the geopolitics of the lockdown is made sense of and experienced. The uncanny sense of danger of places under lockdown further politicized affective atmospheres of many cities and places (Vannini, 2020). The sense of disorientation within the lifeworlds challenged embodied ways of living and breathing within the conditions of porosity and shared vulnerability (Butler, 2022). Moreover, the devastating psychological effects, particularly to racialized and minority ethnic communities and people with pre-existing mental ill health (Rose et al., 2020), testify to the centrality of affect in the ways the pandemic is known and the unequal geographies it engenders.

In the Theme Issue the attention to affect and emotions as pertaining to the sphere of the intimate, is brought about in diverse ways. Torres et al emphasize the emotion of *espera*r as a complex emotional state of waiting and hoping through which the lockdowns are experienced. These and other formal and informal asylum governing technologies gain power through the affective and the emotional by furthering entrapment and immobility. Moreover, emotions can also be site of resistance, empowerment, and agency for the refugee communities. The unruly and empowering character of emotions is further stressed by Saindon, in the discussion on attention as an embodied currency of the pandemic lockdown. This work shows how attention is monetized and privatized by the digital media platforms, but also, at the same time, it exceeds those governing mechanism through politicized practices of distraction. For Laketa and Fregonese, the non-verbal realm of vigilance as micro-reflex is central in establishing the intimate connections between terrorism, militarism, and virus, as they touch upon to the governing of affective states of vigilance across diverse publics. These works, thus, highlight the intimacies of the lockdown through affect, emotions and embodied orientations in times and places of political violence (Fregonese, 2017), furthering the affective geopolitics of the pandemic as a site of governance and a location of resistance.

Intimate methodologies

The contributions to the spatial issue also advance different ways of knowing and researching lockdown. They go beyond official and state narratives to understand the lived dimensions of lockdown and provided grounded accounts of on-going struggles. Several contributions emphasize the intimate as an epistemology of lockdown. Hagan, for example, gives an account of the discomfort and challenges of cohabitation in Calais as a site of intimate meaning making and inquiry into relations of power that "lay bare cracks in … border space" (7). Saindon stresses digital intimacies as a way of establishing connections, reaching out and conducting interviews on and with the diverse digital platforms. Other contributions emphasize further participatory and activist research practices, cultivating knowledges together with marginalized communities rather than about then. Muñoz et al draw on long-standing engagement with the communities that extend way before and after the pandemic lockdown. Similarly, Torres et al work builds on feminist geographic concerns with participatory research practices, developing a bi-national research project involving researchers, but also lawyers and activists. These contributions engage further with questions of social justice, highlighting knowledges, strategies and resources that are deployed to secure well-being under conditions of violence and marginality.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Theme Issue provides significant insights into the political geographies of the lockdown as a state-security measure. States increasingly use detention and containment as a technology of governance globally (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2017; Schliehe et al., 2022). By placing

pandemic lockdowns within this political context, this issue de-exceptionalizes the COVID-19 lockdowns and contributes to theorizing them more broadly. It begins by considering the lockdown's entanglement with neoliberalism, coloniality, racist and patriarchal regimes and the ongoing conditions of violence, marginality, and exposure to death and harm that these systems produce across different contexts. Furthermore, the special issue demonstrates the indispensability of feminist geographical approaches for theorizing and researching the politics of lockdown and the pandemic response in general (Sharp, 2022). These approaches shift the focus from technocentric and disembodied analysis of the policies and the infrastructures of the lockdown, onto the way the lockdown is entangled with gendered, racialized, and embodied, lives and experiences. Most importantly, the Theme Issue further develops feminist engagements with lockdown to rework dominant ideas on security, health, resilience, and preparedness in response to the pandemic. It does that by centering on the intimate as an analytic to pose different questions about the political geographies of the lockdown. The intimate engenders multi-scalar politics of location and difference that allows tracing of seemingly disparate forms of harm and relations of care within the pandemic response. Here, the politics of embodiment, domesticity and affectivity are instead crucial for understanding how lockdowns actively shape and are shaped by intimate geographies.

The papers presented here foreground the sphere of the intimate by highlighting on-the-ground struggles for survival, solidarity, well-being, and care that reformulate and/or contest state-led, neoliberal, and imperialist narratives of security and health. The contributions assess the intimate spatialities of lockdown through a range of conceptual tools, from the notion of the domestic, the urban, the corporeal and the digital that address the emerging relational politics of the pandemic and political upheaval. They also employ a host of different methodologies, from participatory to ethnographic ones. Empirically, the contributions pay a particular attention to sites, spaces and subjectivities considered peripheral or marginal in the dominant framing of the current health crisis, from economically impoverished and racialized neighborhoods to refugee and migrant communities or communities "at the sharp end" of conditions of militarism and political violence. They also show how lockdown as an intimate folding and unfolding of space reveals further the struggles for support and the building of infrastructures of solidarity in different communities that have been impacted by the public health crisis. The papers address what we can learn from these localized acts as the "new normal" that is being rapidly assembled in the geographies of post-COVID. Against the background of rising technological solutions to the pandemic, the intimacies of the lockdown affirm the need for a continuous and systematic building of relational networks and infrastructures of care and solidarity that are crucial for sustaining life and well-being among diverse publics and communities.

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ORCID iD

Sunčana Laketa https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9689-6953

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Sunčana Laketa (MA in Psychology, University of Zagreb; PhD in Geography, University of Arizona) is a Feminist Political and Urban Geographer. Her research sits at the intersection of feminist geographies and theories of affect, emotion and atmospheres. Her interests include different forms of urban and geopolitical conflict, as well as questions of social difference and their corresponding geographies of exclusion, focusing on how these become entangled with everyday places, lives and experiences.

Banu Gökarıksel (B.A. in Economics and M.A. in Sociology, Boğaziçi University; Ph.D. in Geography, University of Washington) is Professor of Geography and Environment and Chair of the Curriculum in Global Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She served as The Caroline H. and Thomas S. Royster Distinguished Professor for Graduate Education at The Graduate School (2018-2021) and the co-editor of the Journal of Middle East Women's Studies (2014-2018). Her research examines bodies, intimacy, and everyday spaces as key sites of politics and geopolitics and contributes to the geography of religion, feminist political and cultural geographies, and gender and Middle East studies. She is co-editor of *Feminist Geography Unbound: Discomfort, Bodies, and Prefigured Futures* (2021).

Sara Fregonese (BA in Middle Eastern Studies and MA in Mediterranean Cooperation, University of Venice; PhD in Geography, Newcastle University) is a Political Geographer interested in the relations between geopolitical dynamics, urban spaces, and everyday life. She is the author of *War and The City. Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon* (Bloomsbury 2019) and Principal Investigator of *Atmospheres of (counter-)terrorism in European cities* (www.atmoct.org), a project funded by ESRC, ANR and DFG, studying the ordinary felt experiences of terror threat and counterterrorism measures in urban public spaces.