

## COVID-19 RESEARCH GRANT

Title: *One Health and One Home: Zoonotic Diseases and the Biopolitics of COVID-19*

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### Quality of research

#### Context

In 2008, as a reaction to the “Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza” (HPAI) outbreak, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in collaboration with the World Health organization (WHO), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Wildlife Conservation Society, published a report entitled “Contributing to One World, One Health. A Strategic Framework for Reducing Risks of Infectious Diseases at the Animal-Human-Ecosystems Interface.” The goal of this report was to help “win the disease battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century while ensuring the biological integrity of the Earth for future generations” (p.51). This report makes for sobering reading today, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: for the “root causes” of such diseases and their pandemic potential, as well as the proposed “strategic framework” required to prevent or mitigate their emergence were clearly set out back then, and just as clearly ignored or downplayed, at least by most countries in the world. The One World, One Health framework has yet to receive serious critical study.

#### Aims

This research project will provide a critical interpretation of the “One World, One Health” framework in light of the current experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and the human/governmental responses to it (in so far as some trends can be already discerned or will be more clearly discerned in the coming months for the duration of the research project).

We shall take this FAO/WHO strategic framework, and related documents, as exemplary of the state of the art thinking for dealing with the causes of zoonotic epidemics, prior to the irruption of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Our aim is to show where and how the on-going response to the pandemic calls into question the thinking behind this strategic framework, with particular attention brought to the conceptualization of the so-called “animal-human-ecosystems interface” and the proposed “biosecurity” point of view on zoonotic disease prevention, control and mitigation. We intend to advance alternative ways to conceptualize this “interface” by employing recent paradigms in animal/human studies, and to enlarge the “biosecurity” perspective through the introduction of a “biopolitical” theoretical perspective.

### Research Questions

We propose to investigate two research questions:

1) What is the theoretical basis for the claim that “human and animal health are intimately connected” and form, in fact, “one health” system that is global (hence the designation “one world”)?<sup>1</sup> Our hypothesis is that the UN-based strategic framework does not seem to offer a

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<sup>1</sup> The principle of “one world, one health” was put forward for the first time in 2004 in the form of the “Manhattan Principles on ‘One World, One Health’”. As can be seen from the title, the document itself appeals to a discourse on “principles” which are, by definition, theoretical and, therefore, call for critical thinking of their presuppositions.

clear theoretical foundation for its appeal to “oneness” with relation to the “health” of different living species. In particular, it turns out that this framework conceives of “one health” as being composed of three “health areas”: human, domestic animal, and wildlife health, that happen to converge across certain “interfaces” and are the root causes of zoonotic diseases, that is, diseases that “jump” across species. The “Manhattan Principles on ‘One World, One Health’” refers to the concept of “ecosystem integrity” (p.51) as giving support to all forms of life on the planet, but the connection between “ecological integrity” and “one health” remains to be explored.

Our project seeks to understand how the “interface” between these three health “domains” is being conceived, and how this conceptualization needs to be reconceived today in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. What exactly do these “Animal-Human-Plant-Environment interfaces” look like, such that these bio- and socio-political “jumps” are possible? What are their topological features? Formulated more critically, we hypothesize that although the rhetorical emphasis is placed on the One-ness of life on the planet, the instrumental and anthropocentric approach to domestic animals and wildlife is maintained, thus performatively calling into question the “One World, One Health” formula.

2) The second research question regards the strategy to fight the “disease battles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. The “Manhattan Principles” speak of the need to develop “adaptive, holistic and forward-looking approaches to the prevention, surveillance, monitoring, control and mitigation of emerging diseases and take the complex interconnections among species into full account” (52). Throughout the report the emphasis is placed on achieving better “biosecurity” along the three above mentioned interfaces, with special attention being given to the “industrial farming system” which, as the report emphasizes, is required to feed the growing desire for “meat products” among developing populations.

However, it is very clear from the current approaches to mitigating the effects of COVID-19 that world-wide governments have implemented not biosecurity, but *bio-political measures*, that is, where what is being “surveilled, monitored, controlled and mitigated” are no longer (just) other animal species but also human beings considered as bearers of a threat to society and thus requiring to be managed for the sake of “saving society.” This is the formula employed by Michel Foucault in his discovery of the phenomenon of biopolitical governance.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that COVID-19 has brought to the attention of the entire world our “biopolitical” predicament: not only are we, first and foremost, living and material beings (*zoe*) who also happen to live together through political self-organization (*bios*), but this pandemic has made it crystal clear that our politics (and economics) are entirely dependent on how we “govern” or “manage” our species or biological life in relation to that of other living species with whom we share the surface of the earth (*zoe*). But the response to COVID-19 via the global adoption by governments of bio-political policies effecting the “lockdown” of their citizens into their “homes” the following question: what is the new topology of the biopolitical response? How is species jump related to this new bio-politics of the “home”? What is the connection between One Health and what we shall call One Home?

Our hypothesis is that the requirement for achieving “One World, One Health” in light of this pandemic calls forth the need to think about the earth as “One Home” shared by living species that cannot be spatially segregated. In other words, we hypothesize that zoonotic diseases and

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *One Must Save Society*; see also *Security, Territory, Population*

the government response to their control and mitigation introduces the new phenomenon that we shall call “global domesticity.”

Our research seeks to set the groundwork for the analysis of the role of domesticity in relation to some of the proposed surveillance and governmentality mechanisms being currently considered and that were not at all foreseen or thematized ten years ago. In particular, we seek to understand the relation between the “**intimate linkages** among the human, animal and ecosystem health domains” to the centrality of the **domestic sphere** in the attempt to control the spread of the virus and mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

### **Potential impact on COVID-19 response**

The goal of the “One World, One Health” framework was to “diminish the threat and minimize the global impact of epidemics and pandemics due to highly infectious and pathogenic diseases of humans and animals, underpinned by enhanced disease intelligence, surveillance and emergency response systems at the national, regional and international levels” (p.17). The need for some such framework has now become self-evident. But in order to achieve a new framework, it is imperative to elaborate the beginning of an analysis of the flawed assumptions and presuppositions that characterized the previous framework. This new pandemic has brought to light unexpected features at the biopolitical level that will be with us for the foreseeable future. This project hopes to contribute to the coming public debate on the legitimacy and efficacy of future biopolitical surveillance and control mechanisms across living species.