

Colleen Cronin | International Response to Coronavirus

From Alvaro Martínez's apartment window, he has a great view of Madrid, Spain. Living near Palacio Real, he can usually see scores of tourists shuffling down narrow, cobblestone streets, businesspeople on break smoking in alleyways, and friends sharing beers and tapas under awnings at outdoor cafes and bars.

Since the coronavirus hit Spain, and the country went into [lockdown](#) on March 13, Alvaro's view is still beautiful, but uncharacteristically quiet.

Along with 47 million other Spaniards, Alvaro, 22, a recent college grad who lives with his family in Madrid's city center, has stayed home for six weeks under some of the strictest measures taken in Europe to prevent the spread of the virus.

Formerly the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic and second only to the United States in their number of reported virus-related deaths, Spain is only just starting to soften its restrictions.

Madrid is in "Phase Zero," the earliest and most restrictive phase of the country's reopening plan. Restaurants and shops are still closed to take-out and curbside options. Only stores that sell groceries, medicines, and tobacco are open.

Citizens may now leave their homes to exercise, but only during time slots designated for specific age groups. Residents must stay within one kilometer of their homes if they are walking. If running or biking, the distance restriction is removed — a loophole Alvaro has used to run to his grandfather's apartment eight kilometers on the other side of the city to say hello through the window.

The draconian measures have halted Spanish life, moving it indoors and online.

"In Spain, we are always in bars, talking with people," Alvaro said. "And there are a lot of bars, it is the country with the most bars in the whole world."

Life in Spain is lived more in-person than in other cultures. Unlike in the United States, delivery services like Amazon are only accessible in large cities. Even though Jeff Bezos' reach does extend to Spain's capital, Alvaro said, "The people of Spain like to go to the supermarket, choose their fruit, talk to the fish vendor to ask, 'Which fish are the freshest?'"

Before the pandemic, Alvaro lived the typical life of a Spanish youth. He'd wake up for work in the apartment where he lives with his mother, father and sister. He'd take the metro to his office, stay until about six p.m., then head to the gym for an hour before going home. Every Thursday night, he'd go out to the bar with his friends for a drink and a before-dinner snack.

Now, Alvaro wakes up 20 minutes before work starts, no need to get ready for the outside world. From his room, he talks to his bosses over Zoom before getting started on his projects.

He counts himself lucky. Alvaro works for the database business Oracle, and as an American tech company, it had infrastructure ready to enable working from home, while many other Spanish companies [struggled to get their workers online](#).

When Alvaro is done working on this computer, and because tapas nights are out of the question, to socialize, he'll call some friends or his girlfriend over video chat to share a beer.

"My girlfriend lives in another city, Seville," he said, a two-hour long, pre-pandemic train ride away. He looks forward to visiting her, but fears travel restrictions between cities will continue for months.

"So, the truth is, I don't know when I'll see her again," he said.

What he's missing in time with his friends and girlfriend, Alvaro is making up through time with his family. They've been watching more movies, playing games together, and having conversations they wouldn't usually get to have.

There definitely are more fights, he said, despite the fact that the living arrangement isn't new to them. The vast majority of Spaniards [under-thirty live with their parents](#), but Alvaro doesn't usually spend this much time at home.

With all the time inside, Alvaro has enjoyed getting out of his apartment during the brief windows the government has allotted for outdoor recreation.

Starting Saturday May 2, from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. (traditionally tapas time), Alvaro, along with others counted in the low-risk, adult group may leave their apartments and stretch their legs. Other time slots are designated for high-risk Spaniards, elderly residents over 70 years old, and parents with children.

During the first weekend of the policy softening the restrictions on outdoor activities, "the streets were full of people," Alvaro said. "But the majority were respectfully distancing themselves." Masks are only mandated on public transportation, but many walkers were still wearing them.

Bars and restaurants are still closed, but some city dwellers tried to recreate them outside. Alvaro said there were "plenty of people sitting on benches, talking, drinking beers, and it is a huge problem."

On the first day of the new policy, police in Madrid [broke up 30 botellones](#), usually small parties of friends sharing drinks outside.

Although some college-age Spaniards have participated in forbidden gatherings and others have gone viral for [dancing close together](#) in the streets, activities Alvaro would have normally seen outside his window and joined in himself before the pandemic started, he said for the time being he will continue to keep his distance.

Without effective testing, vaccines or therapeutics, Alvaro said, “We don’t know much longer until we can live life normally again in the street.”

So, for now, he will go to his fridge, not the bar, share a beer with his friends over Zoom, not out in the street, and wait.

## When Protests Meet Pandemic

By Kelsey Turner

Last October, one million protesters marched through the streets of Santiago, Chile, demanding a new constitution. Today the streets are silent.

As the novel coronavirus rapidly spreads through Chile, daily political protests against inequality have stopped. Yet in an attempt to protect its economy, the Chilean government plans to reopen malls, businesses, and schools throughout May.

Although the pandemic has put Chile's social movement on pause as protesters socially distance themselves, Chileans' frustrations with their government remain the same. The government's Covid-19 response has only strengthened their reason for first taking to the streets in October—they are fed up with living in a nation that they say prioritizes the economy over the well-being of its citizens.

On October 6, 2019, a four-cent rise in metro fares was the symbolic spark that set Chile on fire. Protests by high school and university students quickly escalated into a nationwide movement calling attention to the country's vast social and economic inequality. Recent World Bank statistics report that the richest 1% control 33% of Chile's total wealth.

Protesters argue that because Chile's social services are provided largely by the private sector, very few Chileans can afford access to quality services, including healthcare.

Nathalie Tello, a student at Catholic University in Santiago, protested against Chile's unequal healthcare system. "The system that this country has, it's not a human system," Nathalie said. "The problem isn't that there isn't good healthcare or good education, because there is. The problem is that you have to pay very very high costs to have it."

Activists demand the creation of a constitution that prioritizes equality, not the economy. They say that the current constitution, written in 1980 during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, enshrines a free-market model that benefits only the rich.

After declaring a state of emergency on October 18 and sending the armed forces onto the street, President Sebastian Piñera agreed to hold a national referendum. Originally scheduled for April 26, the referendum would decide whether Chile will write a new constitution.

The protests calmed down a bit over the winter holidays, but activists planned to return to the streets in March.

Coronavirus upended those plans. The government announced the postponement of the referendum by six months to prevent large gatherings of people on voting day.

While protesters widely agree with this postponement for public health reasons, they are determined to resume protests when the virus passes. Activists are unsatisfied with the government's Covid-19 response, which they believe has not gone far enough to contain the virus. They criticize the administration for sacrificing people's health in its attempts to keep the economy open.

"It's super inconsistent on the government's part to move a referendum to avoid spreading, and to keep having people on public transportation every morning and evening because they have to keep going to work," Nathalie pointed out.

Nathalie, who lives with her grandmother, has witnessed firsthand the poor attention, long wait times, and inadequate medical resources her grandma receives at Chile's public hospitals. Without access to quality healthcare, Nathalie knows that getting sick could be a matter of life or death for her grandma.

Despite virus-related health concerns that people like Nathalie's grandma face, the government is determined to keep Chile's economy running.

The general manager of the Santiago Chamber of Commerce, Carlos Soublette, recently announced that shopping malls will begin to reopen. "We can't kill all economic activity to save lives, because later we'll be regretting that people are dying of hunger," Soublette said.

Gabriel Campos, also a student at Catholic University who protested last fall, feels that the government's prioritization of the economy is not in the best interest of Chilean citizens.

"The government is also worrying a lot about the private sector, because most people in government are from the private sector," he explained. "So when you decide to open the malls, that's no longer caring about people, that's about making the economy earn money again."

In late March, 56 mayors in central Chile wrote an open letter to Chilean Health Minister Jaime Mañalich urging him to mandate total quarantine. Total quarantine would ban people nationwide from leaving their residences without a permit. While certain provinces are currently in government-mandated lockdown, many remain open.

In their letter, the mayors argued that mandating total quarantine would enable them to "better account for the main objective in this situation, namely, the protection of the lives and health of all Chileans."

Mañalich responded that a total lockdown would be an "absurd" and "disproportionate" measure. Chile soon plans to issue release cards to those who have recovered from the virus, despite the World Health Organization's warnings against this measure. Those with a card would be free from all quarantine restrictions, allowing them to return to work.

Mañalich claimed there is a “high probability” these people are no longer contagious. The WHO, however, stated that there is no evidence that recovered individuals are immune from re-infection. Those with cards may also be less likely to follow public health advice, further increasing risk of transmission.

As the government helps protect the private sector, however, it has done little to help citizens who have lost their jobs due to the virus. Nathalie mentioned that people who live or work in quarantined provinces are legally barred from getting to work, yet the government offers them very little unemployment compensation.

“The Department of Labor says, you can’t go to work because we say you can’t go to work. And also, if you don’t work, we won’t pay you,” she remarked.

For Nathalie and Gabriel, the Piñera administration has made it clear that even in a pandemic, its decision to protect the economy rather than its citizens has not changed. And just as the administration’s prioritization of the economy continues, so too do protesters’ frustrations with their government.

The protests may have stopped for now, but Gabriel is certain of one thing:

“When this is done for good, there will be a lot of people on the streets.”

## **As Cuban grade-schoolers finish their school year through TV-broadcast lessons, university students sit idle**

Dylan Majsiak

23-year-old Eliani Matienzo of Havana, Cuba has not had a college class since schools across the country closed to fight the spread of coronavirus in late March. She spends quarantine inside her apartment watching TV with her mother, waiting for updates on how this pause in her education will affect her plans. The epidemic has completely brought university education to a halt on the island, where precarious internet access makes transitioning to online classes impossible: An hour online is \$1, and the monthly salary is \$30.

While Eliani sits idle, her 15-year-old cousin Angel, on the other hand, attentively tunes in to his 9<sup>th</sup> grade school lessons on his family's TV set. Without universal internet access, the Cuban government has turned to television to broadcast courses for primary and secondary students. But universities cannot do the same because courses vary greatly across majors, unlike the universal curriculum of the early education levels. Instead, students like Eliani are left indoors unsure of what an unfinished semester may mean for their future.

"I'm still in contact with all the students in my class, but we're not talking about school at all because at this moment courses have been suspended," Eliani said. She also keeps in contact with the American exchange students who studied at the University of Havana alongside her this semester, though they are currently finishing their coursework online back in the U.S.

With all six of her courses cancelled, there has not been much for her to do but try to keep in touch with classmates over WhatsApp, but her data, a novelty in Cuba enjoyed by few, is to expire in a few days.

In their first week at home, Eliani and her classmates used WhatsApp to share course materials from their professor in order to continue learning in their Sociology of the Family course independently. Some members of the group — whether due to not having a phone or having run out of data — would scramble to connect on the phones of their parents or other family members. However, the Ministry of Higher Education disallowed independent learning between students and professor on April 9 since inaccessibility to Wi-Fi was causing students to leave their residence and break social-distancing measures in order to connect online.

"It is true that there is uncertainty here like there is in almost all countries, but in Cuba there is obviously an additional problem and that is that internet still is not sufficiently distributed enough to assume that everyone has access," wrote Rainer Schultz, a Harvard historian based in Havana, in an email. "The Ministry of Higher Education has made the decision not to continue online classes because in Cuba there is an equitable approach that all students must have the same opportunities."

Even if internet were accessible to all students, American platforms such as Zoom or Whiteboard would still be blocked in Cuba, Schultz noted. They fall under the category of a 'prohibited transaction' by the cyber sanctions imposed by the United States Department of the Treasury.

Using some of the remaining minutes on her phone, Eliani calls her little cousin Angel one evening after clapping on her balcony for the healthcare workers getting off shift, a new nightly ritual of her mother and her at home. Angel now wakes up late and watches his lessons on his family's television set in the afternoon. He tells her he misses saying good morning to his classmates and teachers at the Escuela Solidaridad con Panamá, a special education school for students with physical or mental disabilities from pre-K to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Those at his school with mental disabilities have been instructed to follow the lessons that pertain to what would technically be of a lower grade level while at home, said teacher Lorell Caballero Zayas.

Angel — like all Cuban students — was initially set to return to school April 20, but the Cuban Ministry of Education announced that the educational programming would instead enter its second phase and last until the end of the school year. While lessons for elementary schoolers have concluded, mathematics and history lessons have doubled for upper grade levels, following suggestions from parents about these subjects warranting more time.

“The majority of the instructive activities transmitted on TV are live, which works to our advantage in case one does not work well one day or if a parent has a concern,” Minister of Education Ena Elsa Velázquez Cobiella said to Cuban families on April 17 on the Cuban news program, Mesa Redonda, when announcing the extension of online classes. She recalled the case of a father from the eastern province of Las Tunas who called because his son in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade could not tune in to broadcasted lessons because the family did not have a television. In situations like this, the regional directors of the Ministry quickly obtain the contact information of these families to find a solution. Sometimes recordings are brought to a student's house, or they may be authorized to use the television at the nearest school, in a way that still conforms with social distancing measures.

But without any technological adaptation of the college curriculums, university students like Eliani remain unclear of what is to come — whether they should expect to spend an extra year to make up for lost time or perhaps enroll in a summer session if the county's onward ascent of over 1,700 cases begins to flatten.

In her fourth year, Eliani is concerned about making progress on her thesis, which is a graduation requirement for many programs.

“In the fourth year of the sociology track, there is a course called **Social Prevention** which works to prepare you for your thesis,” Eliani said, who was preparing to enter her final year of the sociology program at the University of Havana before the pandemic. “You have to do the first and second chapter of the thesis before entering your 5<sup>th</sup> year. By not having that class, we've lost that time.”

For several hours each day, Eliani tries to work on her thesis about the dual role of Cuban women in the workplace and at home, but she is finding it much more difficult to work from her

small apartment in Havana. While she hopes her efforts will prevent her from falling behind, she admits her work is greatly curtailed by being unable to meet with her teacher to revise these early chapters.

Primary and secondary level students will progress to the next grade level, according to the Cuban Ministry of Education, but it remains unclear what is to happen to university students, especially those who may not qualify to graduate due to lost time working on theses.

Daileydi Delgado D a, a fifth year studying agriculture at the University of Havana, said in a YouTube comment that she is frustrated with the Ministry of Higher Education’s avoidance of specifics regarding these students.

“Myself and all Cuban students in their fifth year would like to know what will happen to our thesis work, since Mesa Redonda does not say anything concrete. If a measure is going to be taken, what will it be? Many of us have not been working on our theses because we are unable to move from place to place.”

Gerardo Hernandez, a tourism student in his final year at the University of Havana, is also unable to continue work on his thesis from his home in Artemisa, a small province outside of Havana. He has not had access to the necessary readings and materials since he returned to his parents’ house after the university shut down.

“There’s an uncertainty regarding what could happen next. All I have left to do is graduate and there is that uncertainty if that will happen this year or next,” Gerardo said from his childhood room in Artemisa. Instead of working on his thesis, he now spends most of his time with family, working out, and using up the data he has left.

“It’s important for students who are in their last year to graduate this year because some may have a vulnerable economic situation and need to help at home,” Eliani said emphatically. The housing crisis in Cuba — which forces generations of families to live together under one roof — also makes it difficult for some students to spend another year at home. Some are eager to enter the job market in order to secure housing alternatives.

“The students who are working on their thesis now evidently are not going to present their thesis in May. I don’t think they will have to repeat courses but no one knows what’s going to happen” said Canal Caribe journalist Liz Olivia Fernandez, adding that those in their final year of university will be the most affected by the crisis. “It seems the government is going to extend quarantine because the number of cases continues to rise in Cuba. Everything is uncertain.”

“Much beyond the financial necessity to graduate, it’s a personal goal that many have held for a long time, and they deserve to feel proud of themselves.” Eliani said, waking up from another daytime nap, a quarantine luxury that does not fit Angel’s class schedule. “But certainly the country will do everything it can to make sure that happens.”

Before Mauricio Salinas prepares his early-morning coffee, he turns on his 3D printer. He enters code so he can begin printing masks for doctors in Bolivia's hospitals. The machine roars to life and begins its shrill hum as Salinas prepares breakfast.

A high school teacher in Cochabamba, Salinas teaches robotics and coding virtually while the masks print behind him. From eight in the morning until noon, Salinas video calls his students. The shrill tick of the printer drums on. During his lunch break, he checks the masks and inserts more plastic.

"We are strong, and we are fighters," Salinas said of himself and other Bolivians producing protective equipment from home. Over the past two months, he has printed over one hundred thirty masks.

Salinas' fighter mentality is ingrained. "Mutual aid has been something that people have always practiced in Bolivia," Graduate student Jessica Robinson said.

The country is currently at a crossroads between two regimes, awaiting a postponed election. In this time of uncertainty, for some, previous President Evo Morales' legacy is on trial. Despite political precarity, citizens in Bolivia are assisting each other in this crisis, as they have for centuries.

Elected in 2006, Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous president in a country with over 35 culturally distinct groups and about 40 native languages. "The poor and the humble will continue to be a priority for the state; it's for them that we have won" he said while commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the country's revised constitution. Morales strove to make Bolivia self-reliant and independent after decades of foreign economic interference.

During his rise, he eliminated presidential term limits and other executive restraints. After he declared himself the victor of a fourth term in October, protests erupted. By November, the military supported a new leader and Morales fled to Mexico. Ultimately, Morales was ousted.

In light of COVID-19, Interim President Añez postponed the country's May 3rd election. As the country approaches 1000 confirmed novel coronavirus cases and grapples with Morales' successors, some question his legacy. Despite the political climate, citizens are anything but complacent. They remain committed to aiding one another.

"Traditionally in Bolivia, before all of this, before Evo and before the dictatorship, it has always been a place with really deep organizational ties," Robinson said. This sentiment is particularly true where Salinas lives, in Cochabamba. The country's third largest city was once home to the famed "Water Wars," where citizen protests expelled a multinational corporation that owned their municipal water system. Now, as citizens are isolating, social organizing has taken a new form.

Jose Carlos Marquez, like Salinas, is an example of these ties. Founder of Quantum, Bolivia's first electric car company, Marquez transformed his factory into a ventilator workshop. He imported enough motors from China to produce over 300 ventilators.

"I hope we don't have to use them but in case we need them, here they will be," Marquez said of the ventilators his factory makes. Based on the country's current facilities, it seems they will be needed. In El Alto, the region next to the capital, there are over one million inhabitants, but only eight ICU beds, Robinson said.

"The political situation is complex. My country is vulnerable in some ways and strong in others," Salinas said.

For Morales, soccer stadiums were a strength. "Building soccer stadiums is like building hospitals," Morales said while announcing the state's universal healthcare mandate last year.

Marquez said these efforts were "bread and circus." He pointed out that his country has lots of soccer fields but not enough ICU beds or ventilators. Morales' critics would say this was inevitable. The country's new administration claimed that Morales spent four times as much building soccer fields as on hospitals.

This complaint was echoed by doctors. When Morales passed the universal healthcare mandate, doctors protested the plan's inadequacy. "We don't have any supplies, there aren't enough beds," Erwin Viruez, now the Vice Minister of Health, said at the time.

For others, these complaints do not capture the scope of Morales' contributions. "This is a gross oversimplification," Robinson said. Morales created over 16,000 additional medical jobs, doubling the amount that existed before 2005, Dr. Gabriela Montaña, former Minister of Health, said in an interview with the Bolivian Information Forum. Morales also built over 3,000 health facilities, compared with the 2,000 that existed prior to 2005. As a result, the World Health Organization found that Morales' universal healthcare mandate provided care to over 30,000 people.

Morales also made substantial gains for the country's poor. From 2006 to 2019, the poverty rate halved, and the economy grew at almost 5% annually. This growth, however, has halted since Morales' overthrow and worsened with the spread of COVID-19.

Economic uncertainty is particularly troubling for those that live day to day. Because almost two thirds of the population work in the informal sector, many live "hand to mouth," BIF found. With people only leaving their houses once a week, it is increasingly difficult for workers to sustain their families. As a result, rural producers are utilizing their informal networks to deliver food in urban centers. Efforts like Salinas' and Marquez's are present in multiple industries.

"The mindset for thousands of years has been communities taking care of themselves," Robinson said. Salinas and Marquez embody this approach. Political uncertainty has not stopped them.

Because, as Salinas said, “There are lots people, really capable, like me who are trying to work really hard to help other people.”

## **Meat for the Tigers: How One Man and His Instagram are Convincing Thousands of Dominicans to Stay Home During COVID-19**

Mariela Pichardo

San Francisco de Macorís, Dominican Republic—April 29, 2020

Since mid-March, tens of thousands of Dominicans have spent their nights demanding “Carne” on singer Don Miguelo’s Instagram live feed. Today, as the urban artist announces the start of another stream of his hit show “From Zero to Ten,” excited fans flood the comments with meat emojis, letting him know that they are ready for the main event.

“We remind everyone not to forget these recommendations from the international radio host, D.M.!” Don Miguelo says in a deep voice, dragging out the last syllable. He presses play on his sound board, starting a pre-recorded show introduction. “Zero frogs, zero tilapia, zero ants, zero hippopotamuses,” it begins in his same low tone.

The host, a 38-year-old brown-skinned man with large eyes and a Dutch beard, takes a swig from a half-filled liter of vodka. “Zero chicken legs, zero chikungunya...the best women, lots of meat, oh my goodness!” the recording continues.

“46 thousand and we haven’t even seen an ear yet!” he exclaims with a grin and puff of a cigar.

In the next few minutes, Don Miguelo will be joined by a voluptuous Peruvian woman in a tiny bikini. Unprompted, she will prop up her phone and drop to all fours, twerking into the camera. In the comments, viewers fall into a frenzy, filling the screen with multicolored hearts that float up from the bottom of the display. A collection of T-bone steak, fire, and Dominican and Peruvian flag emojis decorate the comments, along with declarations that the woman is an abuser, really meaning enchantress, scattered between them.

Under a state-mandated curfew aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 since March 20, “From Zero to Ten” returns a sense of normalcy to life in the Dominican Republic. Historically known for its profound sense of community and penchant for celebration, congregating, particularly after curfew, is now strictly prohibited. To ensure that gatherings or parties are not occurring, law enforcement officials patrol the streets from five p.m. to six a.m. The current state policy is to arrest anyone found out, regardless of their reason for disobeying the restriction.

While this policy has reduced the frequency of non-essential contact in the country, it has not managed to curtail it completely. According to *Dominican Today*, from the time the curfew was introduced to the first week of April, about thirty thousand people were arrested for being out after hours. This number would likely have been much higher, however, had it not been for “From Zero to Ten.”

Don Miguelo’s Instagram Lives originally began as nothing more than a joke. “I turned on my Live, like I do every day, and said ‘okay,’ today I’m going to do a program,” he said in an exclusive interview with Dominican radio host Santiago “Alofoke” Matias on March 30. “Then,

right there while live the idea came to me to do something that would allow people to vote. ‘From zero to ten’—who looks the best, who’s the hottest.” Within less than two weeks, the informal live transformed into a proper show and cultural phenomenon fit with its own sayings, songs, and a massive following.

On April 1, Don Miguelo’s interactive nighttime show broke the Instagram Live record for the most simultaneous viewers at one time. Surpassing three hundred and eighty-nine thousand viewers, it shattered the previous record, which was held by international popstar Taylor Swift. At one point prior to the arrival of COVID-19 to the Americas, Taylor Swift had amassed over one hundred and fifty thousand viewers on an Instagram Live stream.

According to New York City radio station Power 105.1, Don Miguelo’s record was later broken on April 20, when African American music legends Babyface and Teddy Riley surpassed five hundred thousand viewers during a catalogue battle.

With time, Don Miguelo’s audience has grown beyond the Dominican Republic and now includes a faithful following from Spain, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, the United States, and many more countries. A wide variety of international celebrities have watched his live streams including rapper Cardi B, tropical singer Prince Royce, and reggaeton artist, Ozuna, among many others.

“From Zero to Ten” broadcasts multiple times a week and on average, brings in about two hundred thousand viewers with each stream. Don Miguelo attributes the success of the program to its carefree and lighthearted vibe. “People are tired of hearing about the virus,” Don Miguelo says. “They just want to have fun, and that’s what I’m giving them.”

On another stream of the show, which began with Don Miguelo calling Lisa, a Dominican woman in New York, the singer was tasked with convincing her to perform for his audience. After some brief encouragement she flashed a mischievous smile and replied with just the warning “protect yourself” as she propped up her phone.



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“Jesus Christ, oh my God—” Don Miguelo murmured, as the woman’s large backside came into view for the first time. Dressed in a grey tank top and black leggings, the guest began flexing her glute muscles. As her bottom bounced, the singer’s eyes grew wide, as if innocent with surprise.

“She shook it! She shook it!” a wide-mouthed Don Miguelo yelled about six times. “The devil, damn!” he exclaimed and flipped a switch on the soundboard. As “Let’s Get It On” by Marvin Gaye began to play, the singer threw up his arms and sank into his rolling chair, besides himself at her performance.

This moment would inspire the creation of the first of two original soundtracks for From Zero to Ten. In this instance, “Lo Vibró,” or she shook it, a dembow song which features rapper Bulin 47. The chorus of the track is the chant, “She shook it! She shook it!” which the two exclaim in unison. In the background, throughout the song an overwhelmed Bulin cries out with delight, his words unintelligible.

The music video for this song, which topped the YouTube Top 100 list in the Dominican Republic on May 2, is a reenactment of Don Miguelo’s Instagram Live videos. Its first verse is also the recorded introduction of From Zero to Ten, delivered as a rap. With this upload, Don Miguelo displaced chart strongholds such as “Yo Perreo Sola” by Bad Bunny and “Rumba” by Rocky RD.

Despite the overwhelming success of From Zero to Ten, it has not come without criticism. Following Don Miguelo’s record breaking show, Evangelical Pastor Maiker Carpiadosa publicly reproached the singer, on his own Instagram Live stream.

“Tell Don Miguelo that the pastor said if he does not stop those Lives, the promotion of pornography, the hand of God will deal with him,” Carpiadosa bellowed with fervor. Contrary to the pastor’s allusions, however, Don Miguelo immediately removes any participants that attempt to expose their intimate areas from the Live due to Instagram’s strict no-nudity policy.

Other critics, particularly journalists, have claimed that Don Miguelo has not done enough to support the Dominican people during this difficult time. For Latin America and the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic ranks among the countries with the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases. Native to and based in San Francisco de Macorís, the original epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, Don Miguelo has been accused of not using his platform and economic resources to aid his community.

Prior to the implementation of the national curfew, however, Don Miguelo made national news for constructing a new home for Doña Juana, an elderly woman living in a collapsing home with ten grandchildren. He also did the same for an older man named Don Francisco, who was living in similarly haphazard conditions. These humanitarian efforts were the latest in a series of community-based home improvement projects initiated by Don Miguelo, which began in 2017.

On April 11, to the dismay of many, Don Miguelo announced what would be his final show. To celebrate its success and give back to the community, \$1,000,000 Dominican Pesos (DP) worth of food rations were donated to families in ten municipalities deeply affected by COVID-19. Among these, was San Francisco de Macorís, to which the singer later donated an additional DP\$250,000 of his personal funds.

This goodbye was short-lived. Bombarded with requests for more Lives, T-bone steak emojis filling the comments of his Instagram posts, Don Miguelo was back in little more than a week’s time.

“The tigers want meat!” Don Miguelo shouts in an early post-hiatus video, through puffs on a cigar. He flips a switch on his soundboard, playing his latest track, “Carne” which features three-time Latin Grammy Award winning producer Maffio.

“So, let’s give them meat,” he says, and calls his next participant.

### Corona in Your Prayers

As the COVID-19 crisis hits Egypt, a new phrase has appeared on WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages: “*Isورونا* fe salawatkom.” This comic rendition roughly translates to “Corona in your prayers.”

It plays on an Arabic phrase commonly heard among Coptic Orthodox Christians, a religious community which originated in Egypt. The expression is “*Izkuruna* fe salawatkom,” meaning “Remember us in your prayers.”

In Egypt, the North African country with the highest prevalence of novel coronavirus cases, humor has been a coping mechanism.

A comedic Egyptian music video stars rows of men and children dancing shoulder-to-shoulder, ignoring the very protective measures about which they are singing. Facetious lyrics like, “we won’t kiss you, you don’t kiss us” and “we will wash our hands with water and soap” evolve into verses that reveal the video’s true message: “calm down a little, people.”

Another video features an Egyptian reporter interviewing “Coronavirus,” a man wearing a full green face mask with spiked protrusions. The interviewer asks questions such as, “Many people in Egypt are scared of you; what would you like to say to them?”

His response? “This is all just the talk of social media...Egypt is exaggerating.”

Egyptian celebrities seem to agree. Among those mocking the pandemic is comedian Badria Tolba. Referencing the Egyptian chocolate company Corona, Tolba said, “I actually like Corona with milk and Turkish delight.”

As reported in *Arab News*, sales of Corona chocolate have actually gone up during the pandemic. Egyptians have made it a point to jokingly purchase chocolate bars from the company which shares its name with COVID-19. According to one Egyptian salesman, “The virus has been the best advertising we’ve ever had.”

The Egyptian media’s lighthearted response to the global crisis may once have reflected the government’s laissez-faire attitude towards the pandemic. But ever since two Egyptian army generals died from the novel coronavirus disease in late March, the government’s policies to curb the spread of the virus have been anything but laid-back.

These policies include a curfew from 8pm to 6am. Restaurants offer delivery only. Egyptians returning to their home country from abroad were mandated to self-quarantine for 14 days in all-expenses-paid luxury hotels. Furthermore, the Egyptian parliament has proposed an app that tracks coronavirus cases by name and location and sends test results to patients’ phones.

One of the government's most dramatic actions was shutting down places of worship.

Mary is a 22-year-old Coptic Orthodox Christian woman in Cairo. She is proud of her government for the measures it has taken, even if those measures have meant a disruption in her usual religious observances.

Coptic Orthodox Christians, or Copts, are the largest minority religious group in Egypt, making up less than 10% of the population. For them, the COVID-19 viral pandemic hit during one of the holiest periods of the year, the Great Lent, which began on February 24 and culminated in the celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection, or Easter, on April 19.

Copts, including Mary, typically spend much of this 55-day period, particularly the final week, in prayer at church. By late March, however, things changed: the Egyptian government ordered the closing of churches to worshippers. In-person church services were replaced by virtual prayers on Zoom and broadcasts to CTV, the Coptic TV station.

This order also extended to the country's 114,000 mosques, where Muslims, who are the religious majority in Egypt, go to pray.

One such Muslim is a young woman living in Cairo: Mary's friend Dina. She noticed less enthusiasm than usual as she and her fellow Muslims approached Ramadan. During this month, Muslims abstain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset, when they typically gather as communities of friends and family to break the fast each day with so-called "iftar" meals.

Another characteristic of Ramadan is the production of many Egyptian soap operas, or "mosalsalat," typically watched after the daily iftar. However, this year, only 10 of the originally scheduled 40 shows will be released.

In the absence of these traditions and get-togethers, Dina was not looking forward to Ramadan as much as she usually would have; in fact, she was rather unhappy. She, like Mary, thinks the government is doing a "very good job," but she wishes that it had acted earlier to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Both Mary and Dina are also disappointed that, while the government is doing everything it can, much of the Egyptian public is not. They say there are many people who are handling the situation very incorrectly.

Christians and Muslims alike can be heard saying "leave it to God" as they leave their homes without protective masks or gloves to go join crowds in groceries. They believe that, should they get infected with coronavirus, it will have been God's will for them.

For those Egyptians, the only safety precaution they need to take is to ask one another to remember them in their prayers.

## #LadyZote's Viral Plea

“The government just sent us soap for dogs!” a Honduran woman complained in a viral video on social media. Within the week she was an internet sensation among Hondurans social media feeds.

“Look! The bag won't last 15 days, there is no detergent, no toilet paper!” the Honduran woman screamed to curious family members and neighbors who had gathered to watch around her mud and cement house with a dirt floor.

The video shows the small woman angrily ripping the bag apart, taking out items in the food provision bag and throwing each one to a dusty table.

The woman in question is #LadyZote, her nickname on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and TikTok. She is protesting the limited food provision given by the Honduran governmental program “Honduras Solidaria.” The program “Honduras Solidaria” is a program helping provide basic necessities to more than 800,000 families amid the Coronavirus pandemic in Honduras.

#LadyZote's video echoes a much wider critique of the Honduran government's corruption and limited credibility. Hungry Hondurans are angry at the government's failures amid the Coronavirus crisis. While #LadyZote's complaints of the “bolsa solidaria” go viral, many Hondurans take to the streets to protest to receive one in the first place.

Online many made fun of #LadyZote as Zote soap is not a “soap for dogs” as she claims in the video but rather a soap that can be used for bathing or washing clothes, others were overall critical of her behavior.

Those who have found the video humorous, have not hesitated to post videos of their own on TikTok bathing with Zote Soap. DJs on Twitter, such as #LadyZote fan @iori\_oficial found the video so funny, he made a musical remix of #LadyZote.

“I leave this small remix for you all to make your quarantine less dull” DJ Iori oficial tweeted using hashtags like #FUERAJOH meaning “Leave JOH.” JOH is Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez's initials. Other users didn't find the video as funny and were offended by #LadyZote's complaints.

“They are donations,” Twitter user @Lalo343x commented, “ If someone gives you something out of their good will, you should only be grateful and that is it. Don't be like #LadyZote.”

For many Hondurans #LadyZote's video is just another form of bad press for the country. Sarahi Mairena from San Pedro Sula, Honduras is especially angry with the video's exposure, and how it's another form of negative news about Honduras.

"This woman only puts us in shame" Sarahi said, "Besides our country being famously known for corruption, we are now labeled stupid."

Honduras has some of the highest rates of corruption in the world. According to [Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions](#) index, on a scale of 0 to 100 (0 being highly corrupt and 100 being highly transparent) Honduras received 26 points. This is its lowest score since 2013. Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez won the presidential election that same year, but was sworn in for his second presidential term among protests and general discontent in 2017.

In the Central American region, Honduras is one of the countries with the highest budget to deal with the Coronavirus pandemic with \$3,742 million dollars. Much more than what El Salvador (\$2,000 million) and Guatemala (\$2,025 million) are spending.

Although part of the sum comes from donations from the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund, most of the money comes from the national budget, and \$3,000 million were approved by new legislation late March. In a televised message on March 29<sup>th</sup> Juan Orlando Hernandez, announced \$14,4 million dollars were approved for the program "Honduras Solidaria."

"Honduras Solidaria" was established by the executive but implemented by local governments. They buy local products as well as antibacterial soaps and masks, and make a "bolsa solidaria" or bag with more than 20 nonperishable food items, and hygiene products, including gel, and face masks. The bags are then delivered to the most needy by the Honduran armed forces.

Although we can see #LadyZote receive the "bolsa solidaria" in the video, many Hondurans have yet to receive one.

While entering San Pedro Sula, the industrial capital of Honduras, next to Megamall waves a big flag that says in red lettering "Our families need food." The city known for its work ethic no longer buzzes with activity.

Since the government ordered an absolute lockdown on March 15, San Pedro Sula has become a ghost town. Some hungry citizens defy Coronavirus and dare go outside to face the scorching heat of the city in desperation.

The "bolsas solidarias," have not reached many neighborhoods in San Pedro Sula. Citizens from Lomas del Carmen, one of the most needy neighborhoods in the city, disobeyed the lockdown order to protest for food. Both old and young went to the streets, some with face

masks and colorful cloths, and carried a Honduran flag with them and posters asking Juan Orlando Hernandez for food.

Outside the St. Peter the Apostle Cathedral in the city center, some street vendors will sit to the side of the road with their wagon of fruits and vegetables, or even phone cases in case a lonely car may drive and they can make some money for the day. The beggars will ambush any cars passing by.

Arnaldo Bueso, Minister of Education, in a national televised message asked families for their patience, while boasting that most neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, the capital city, have timely received the “bolsa solidaria.” With each passing day, Honduran families can’t afford to be patient.

Residents of Tegucigalpa have also taken to the streets, setting up a barricade of burning tires in the main boulevard Suyapa to ask for the “bolsa solidaria.” While Tegucigalpa has 3 bodegas in the city to make the “bolsas solidarias,” San Pedro Sula has just one.

On social media many were oblivious to the food provision bag’s origin and #LadyZote’s most compelling plea, one that was not about dog soap.

“Tell the president to stop stealing the money that has been donated to us, and instead think of “the people”, *nuestro pueblo*, that is suffering.” The humorous tone of the video fades, and we are left with the raw truth, the unfiltered sentiments of Honduran citizens.

Although #LadyZote may be trending on social media for her rant about Zote soap, her viral plea to Juan Orlando Hernandez was not trending topic among those who continue to make videos of themselves bathing with Zote soap and those critical of her “unappreciative” behavior.

Despite mixed responses, #LadyZote’s video portrays the limitations of the program “Honduras Solidaria” and an overall governmental response to the Coronavirus pandemic that has been unable to relieve Honduran’s hunger.

“The president does not suffer, he has food at home” #LadyZote said to the camera at the end of her viral video. There is a sense of urgency for people like her.

“He has a full refrigerator” she states, “we eat shit.”



Aidan Reilly

## The Dictator and The Pandemic

As the COVID-19 virus remains a global threat, cities have fallen silent. Billions have remained indoors, prioritizing isolation over businesses, relationships, family, and faith. Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, tens of thousands of people are gathering- under presidential orders.

The president, Daniel Ortega, has refused to follow the World Health Organization's shelter-in-place order, making Nicaragua an outlier in a world that has shut its doors and been isolating inside for months. Amnesty International released a statement regarding Ortega's actions shortly after his speech on April 15th; "the government of President Daniel Ortega is flagrantly ignoring the recommendations of international human rights organizations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, putting at risk the health and lives of thousands of people in [Nicaragua](#)."

Ortega returned to the public spotlight on April 15th, in his first public address about the international virus. He blamed the United States and liberal democratic regimes for the spread of the virus. "These transnational forces that just want to take control of the planet, that is a sin," [Ortega said](#). "And the Lord is sending us this signal".

Ortega defended his choice to refuse quarantine measures within Nicaragua; "Nicaraguans haven't stopped working, because if this country stops working, it [dies](#)", he preached to thousands of supporters on April 15th. The speech was unpredictable and irrational, themes not uncommon for Nicaragua's leader.

These comments similarly condemn the government's calls for public demonstration that have occurred within the country. In March, the government held a "Love March" in support of all of those affected by COVID-19. Thousands of government supporters, clad in the nationalist party's colors of red and black, waved flags and stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the Hugo Chávez Eternal Commander Rotonda.

Some of those who oppose Ortega believe his disregard for public protocol is revenge for the civil protests in the summer of 2018, in which the violent government response to civilians calling for Ortega to leave office led to over 300 people dead. "You have to understand that the government has not forgotten about who was on their side during 2018 and who wasn't, and it's a fact that private businesses were not" says Cesar Correa, a retired journalist and hotel owner. According to Correa, this theory is widely supported within Nicaragua. Ortega's abrupt change in attitude towards public demonstration, such as the "Love March", has only fueled public belief. "It's surprising that, after preventing and suppressing any form of social protest for the

past two years, it (the government) is now promoting mass marches and gatherings, exposing the population to the pandemic,” [said Erika Guevara-Rosas](#), Americas director at Amnesty International.

In addition to widespread fear of the virus, the state of Nicaragua’s economy looms over the country. When the tragedies of 2018 became international news, Nicaragua’s tourism industry plummeted, dragging the rest of the economy down with it.

As months passed and coverage of the incidents slowed, the tourism industry began to see potential hope of economic resurgence. However, recent closures of shops and small businesses due to the pandemic have set the country back to a post-2018 trickle. Speaking about his small hotel, Cesar Correa describes this economic fluctuation. “Before 2018, I had forty employees. After, I had only four. By January, my staff had grown back up to thirty five, and now I have already had to fire twenty of them. This is not sustainable”.

Although the economic damage has already started to take effect, it is a positive sign that Nicaraguans are not following the president’s dangerous orders to keep businesses open and carry on daily lives as normal.

Nicaraguans feel prepared to handle the situation without Ortega’s guidance. For much of the country, the last several years have been defined by independent and self-protective measures as civil conflict ensued; “we have lived this way for years now, because of him- not leaving the house, having a curfew, enduring economic hardship” says Correa, motioning to the barrel of potable water he keeps for emergency situations.

For a tiny country that has flown largely under the international radar for the last decade, Nicaragua has been the subject of scathing criticism by world news twice in the last three years- first, for the government’s violent response to protests in 2018, and now for its policies during a global pandemic.

In the meantime, Nicaraguans can only act in defiance of government orders that threaten the safety of the 6.4 million people living in the country. If the looping economic and health crisis causes the Ortega administration to collapse, many believe it will be worth it.

by Max Kozlov

When David González López and his posse of farmers arrive in each rural Spanish village, they break the eerie silence of the full scale nationwide lockdown. Villagers welcome the booming sound of the tractors and the bleach that falls on the roads, the sidewalks, the shops, and the restaurants as a shower of hope in these villages.

“We have to get rid of this bug as soon as possible,” said González López, 52, one of a group of landscapers and farmers outside Burgos, Spain that volunteer to drive their tractors that have been retrofitted to disinfect entire villages. “I’ve had to say goodbye to too many friends who, just a few months ago, were completely healthy and shared drinks with me.”

Every few days, González López extends his workday by at least five hours disinfecting communities, after which he still milks his cows, makes dinner for his family, and performs landscaping work for the few clients that continue to contract him.

After a loop around each village, the volunteers walk with backpacks loaded with liquid disinfectant to sanitize the spots where the tractors could not reach. Many of these landscapers were left reeling by the economic devastation of the virus, and yet they disinfect solely out of the goodness of their hearts.

“Nine hundred sixty-one dead in a single day.”

David González López muttered the figure to himself over and over again, as if trying to convince himself that it was real. He could not believe that the virus had claimed so many lives in Spain, where he has lived his whole life.

The group began its work March 16, after officials announced a state of emergency that placed Spain’s 47 million people in confinement. In Spain, the coronavirus had killed more than 27,500 people in the nation and infected nearly 230,000.

Wearing masks, gloves and sterile white suits, the landscapers have to obtain their own protective gear to avoid falling victim to the coronavirus themselves.

In Spain, the countryside is particularly vulnerable to the deadly virus. Spanish rural communities, in particular, tend to skew older, where 29 out of every 100 inhabitants residing in these communities are over the age of 65.

“There’s an entirely inverted population pyramid,” said González López. “There are many more elderly people than young people.”

Castile and León, the province in northern Spain where Burgos is situated, recorded at least 1,930 deaths and more than 18,272 people infected as of Sunday. COVID-19 has proved to be particularly lethal to the elderly, and over a fourth of the region is 65 or older, the second highest percentage of people 65 and over in Spain, according to the Department of Population of the Spanish National Research Council.

The vital work cheers up his soul, but not as much as the applause of the neighbors who show their gratitude for their tireless work every night.

At eight one night, after a tiring night of sanitization, villagers greeted the landscapers and healthcare workers returning from their shifts by coming onto their balconies and patios and blaring “Resistiré” by Duo Dinámico followed by “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor.

The project started when González López reached out to everyone he knew that had access to a tractor via WhatsApp. Now, the group stands more than 50 strong, and all have agreed to set aside the business of landscaping and farming for now.

“Our main concern right now is to get out of this nightmare,” said Jimena Marín, another landscaper who has lost more than 70 percent of her weekly revenue because of the pandemic.

Their effort caught the attention of Spain’s Military Emergencies Unit, who has expanded their volunteer effort across the country in collaboration with the Spanish farmer trade group, Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores (ASAJA). Now, the military unit trains landscapers and farmers on how to use their tractors for massive disinfection work in the villages, unloading the enormous work of the army unit in charge of disaster relief onto generous citizens.

“Farmers and landscapers are not oblivious to the difficult times that we are all going through, and we want to contribute our grain of sand. We will go wherever we’re needed to fight this virus that has affected us all,” Esteban Martínez Zamorano, president of Asaja-Burgos, said.

By last week, the group had sprayed more than 5,000 gallons of disinfectant — water with 2 percent bleach. With all this work of disinfecting the streets, a new crisis has appeared: a severe lack of bleach.

In turn, the landscapers appealed to the villagers for any spare bleach they might have. One or two gallons of bleach at a time, the villagers have brought whatever bleach they find in their homes to the village center so that they can continue disinfecting.

At almost midnight one night, González López finally turns the roaring engine of his tractor off. He stays in the tractor, letting his aching muscles rest. He listens to the crickets chirp and nods to himself—in his heart of hearts, he knows his work is worth the long days. In a couple of days, he will return to the villages to disinfect once again.

Jennifer Alvarez

### Anti-Virus Song Goes Viral

What's more contagious than the coronavirus?

According to Mister Cumbia's fans, his latest song, "La Cumbia del Coronavirus" is just that.

In front of a green screen projecting the internet's humorous depiction of the coronavirus – a magnified generic virus with Mexican Corona beers on it – Mr. Cumbia dances energetically to the calid cumbia rhythm so popular in Mexico and Latin America. As he sways immersed in the sound of the drums, this Mexican artist sings about the coronavirus, enacting many of the song's lyrics.

In the music video, Mr. Cumbia, wearing a Versace-esque jacket, rubs his hands together pretending to lather his hands with anti-virus soap as he sings about the importance of washing one's hands. As he sings about using disinfectants, he pretends to spray disinfectant all over the air around him to protect himself from the novel virus.

Mr. Cumbia's viral hit that has accumulated millions of views on Youtube is more than just another cumbia song one can swing their hips to; it also serves as a public health service announcement raising awareness and cautioning those who listen to it about the deadly coronavirus that has killed many and infected thousands more.

Surprisingly, by releasing this cumbia on January 26, 2020, the self-proclaimed "King of the Viral Cumbia" beat Mexican politicians in notifying the public about the threat the coronavirus posed and recommending them [virologist approved practices](#) to prevent getting sick by the coronavirus.

As one of Mr. Cumbia's fans commented on Youtube, "[he] alerted us of the virus way before our politicians did."

A little over a month after the release of "La Cumbia del Coronavirus," José Manuel Cruz Castellanos, the state of Chiapas' secretary of health, confirmed Mexico's [fifth case of the coronavirus](#).

Yet, despite the country confirming multiple cases of the coronavirus in different states, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, allegedly appeared cavalier towards the growing health crisis.

In a [national press](#) conference he stated, " There are people that say that because of the coronavirus, we can't hug each other. But we should hug one another, nothing will happen."

Obrador, in another press conference, [stated](#) that his conservative opponents "want us to get infected" he continued "that's what they want so they can blame me for everything."

Continuing with the misinformation, President Obrador, during a national press conference in which the coronavirus was discussed by health officials, [declared](#) that his amulets protected him from all "adverse opponents"– including the coronavirus.

The following day, a federal judge [found](#) that the "[Mexican] authorities had failed to implement efficient and necessary sanitary measures proportionate to the risk that the country faces." The judge then gave Obrador's government along with the Minister of Health, Jorge Alcocer and the undersecretary of Prevention and Health Promotion, Hugo López-Gatell Ramírez, 24 hours to present them with an action plan to rectify the situation.

Even with all this criticism it wasn't until March 23 –almost two months since the release of "La Cumbia del Coronavirus"– that the federal government temporary [suspended](#) all non-essential activities, including the cancellation of classes and large events in order for the public to practice social distancing measures and stop the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

Yet that same day, the President uploaded a [video](#) to his social media accounts in which he contradicted the federal government's measures against the coronavirus by encouraging the public to "continue taking the family out to eat at restaurants" and recommending that they "don't stop going out."

By this time, it had been about two months since Mr. Cumbia released his song warning the public about the dangers of crowded places and urging them to "be cautious" in these places.

President Obrador's alleged nonchalant attitude towards the coronavirus drew condemnation from Human Rights Watch, a prominent international human rights non-profit organization.

Jose Miguel Vivanco, the director of the Americas division of the organization, [called](#) Obrador's actions 'a profoundly dangerous example that threatens Mexicans' health.'

Human Rights Watch emphasized that Mexico has a great challenge at hand. The fact that the country has the [highest rates of obesity](#) and diabetes in the world causes the population to be especially susceptible to developing serious complications if they contract the virus.

These complications would require respirators. However, according to Human Rights Watch, Mexico's healthcare system is underfunded, lacks the equipment, and personnel needed to treat the [Pan American Health Organization's](#) projection of as many as 700,000 serious, potentially fatal cases of coronavirus in Mexico.

Currently, the Mexican government seems to be taking the coronavirus seriously, just like Mr. Cumbia urged the public to do three months ago, as they [extended the social distancing measures](#) until the end of May.

Early social distancing measures play a significant role in preventing these large numbers of serious cases from materializing. Yet as the Mexican government had a slow start in addressing the risk of the coronavirus, the repercussions are felt. More than twenty-thousand Mexicans have been infected with the coronavirus and more than one thousand have died from it.

President Obrador along with his administration should have followed Mr. Cumbia's advice to "get their act together" against the coronavirus. As Vivanco stated "Failure to do so...lead[s] to many preventable deaths."

## "Going Days without Meals": Kenya's Impossible Lockdown

by Anna Corradi

NAIROBI, Kenya, May 6 — Lately, Tavita spends her days scrambling to put food on the table. Ever since the Covid-19 crisis broke out in Kenya, she struggles to feed her three children.

Three weeks ago, the shop where she sold her handmade bags was shut down. As a part-time yoga instructor, she lost all of her customers. And her husband, an elevator mechanic, was fired when the building he worked at closed.

"Our savings were already invested in school fees," she said. "We don't have any other savings."

After Kenya's first confirmed case of Covid-19 on March 13th, President Uhuru Kenyatta took drastic policy measures to limit the spread of the disease.

The government suspended all incoming and departing international flights. The capital, Nairobi, is a main hotspot and is subject to strict domestic travel restrictions. The only businesses that are allowed to operate are grocery stores and pharmacies. There is also a mandatory, country-wide curfew between 7pm and 5am.

Kenya is currently on a [partial lockdown](#). While there is no 24/7 stay-at-home order, people's ability to work has been severely compromised by the government's measures.

"It's a mess of a mess," said Tavita. "The curfew is taking away people's sources of income."

The economic repercussions have been devastating. Sweeping job loss has resulted in widespread starvation, an increase in suicide rates, a spike in domestic violence cases, and a surge in crime rates, among other consequences.

Many of President Kenyatta's policies are similar to those enacted in Europe and North America. In the US, many states have imposed a full lockdown. Most people work remotely, and are not supposed to leave their homes unless absolutely necessary.

"There are measures in the Global North that you simply cannot apply to the Global South," said Louise Donovan, a Nairobi-based journalist, in an interview.

Most Kenyans don't have savings to fall back on. Over [80%](#) of the country's population works in the informal economy, and most live "from hand to mouth" or barely accrue any savings, said Clarence Namunyu in an interview. He is the principal of Holyway Junior School, an elementary school in Nairobi for underprivileged children. The school had to shut down as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Tavita is one of the millions of Kenyans without savings to cushion periods of unemployment. "I have to earn to sustain the day," she said. "We depend on running cash."

The Kenyan [government's economic policies such as tax rate and interest rate cuts](#)—part of the "state interventions to cushion Kenyans against economic effects of Covid-19"—don't apply to the vast majority of the population.

Taxes are not a concern for the informally-employed, and lower interest rates only help people by facilitating loans. But [70%](#) of the population does not have access to neither a bank account nor bank credit in the first place.

The government has also asked its citizens to [practice social distancing](#). In a country where several million people live in informal settlements, however, this is nearly impossible.



*Kibera, the largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya*

Entire families live in one-room homes the size of 50 square feet. There is barely any separation from neighbors, and most don't have access to running water. Working remotely under these conditions is simply unimaginable.

County governments have also been shutting down open-air markets, leaving hundreds of thousands of Kenyans jobless and making access to food even harder, according to The Standard, a [local newspaper](#).

On a normal day, these markets are bustling with hundreds of people. They are a spectacle of colors from ripe orange-red mangoes and dark green avocados, to patterned red and blue fabrics.

Today, they are just empty, dirt-covered streets.

People are therefore left to their own devices to avoid starvation. According to Tavita, many try to find new, income-generating means to apply their skills.

Tavita tried to run online yoga classes, but without success. "People rarely pay because everyone is looking to have an income," she said.

She also started to make masks. "I have nowhere to sell them because the market was flooded already," she said. "If I can sell any, it's perhaps two or three."

She still needs the 200-300 Kenyan Shillings (\$2-3) per day that the masks bring home. "It's just a way to find some basic needs," she said. "This is not a good time for me."

Those whose skills are less versatile have even fewer options. Once their savings end, many take to the streets. "There is so much begging," described Clarence Namunyu.

For some, however, there are no options left. "For people who don't know where to start, some are committing suicide," said Tavita. "Others are depressed, stressed." Stories of suicide cases are a daily occurrence in Nairobi nowadays, she said.

The government has been providing meals in some high-density areas. But their distribution often ends in violence. In Kibera—a slum in the center of Nairobi—two residents died in a recent [stampede](#), as people scrambled for food aid.

"People are saying that we cannot stay in and die here," recalled Tavita. "We'd rather die outside while seeking for basic needs."

Extending the curfew to a full lockdown would be "an invitation of bloodshed," she said. It would protect the top-earning 20% of the population, who have access to habitable homes and staff. The other 80%, however, would have little choice but resort to violence as a way to obtain basic needs such as food and clean water.

"People are not even scared of the Covid-19 here," she said. "People are just talking about where the next meal is coming from."

On March 25th, the Kenyan government announced, in [an official press release](#), that it set aside 10 billion Kenyan Shillings (roughly 10 million US Dollars) to financially support "the elderly, orphans and other vulnerable members of our society" through cash transfers.

In interviews with six different Nairobi residents, including Tavita, everyone denied seeing this policy put into practice. "You have to know somebody in the government to receive any kind of assistance," said Bibiana Mudi, a Nairobi-based woman who runs the women-empowerment nonprofit Mama Africa, in an email.

Different contexts require different solutions. So far, most policies implemented in the US and Europe have not been effective in sub-Saharan countries. "If we really need to abide to a government-issued stay at home order," said Tavita, "We also need to address what conditions would make us cooperate and actually stay at home."