

The Realism of Nursing in Kenya during COVID-19

by Imgard Rop

During this period I am thinking of Nairobi more often than usual and not in the sense that I miss home but in the sense that there are many parallels to draw from and differences to reflect on. It's like living in two worlds consciously aware of what is going on. I am reconnecting with friends not just to find out how they are doing but also to get information directly from them especially with misinformation and rumors that are doing rounds on social media and chat groups. The first COVID-19 case was reported in Kenya on March 13, 2020. President Uhuru Kenyatta instituted an indefinite nationwide curfew that began from March 27, from 7pm to 5am in order to contain the virus. So far the Ministry of Health has reported 758 positive cases and 42 deaths. Measures that have been put in place understandably are meant to impede the spread of the virus but what has emerged is a strained health system, gaps within the education system and disconnect from the country's leadership with her people.

One of my old friends from Kenya is named Miriam*we have known each other since high school. We were on the same sports team for four years and shared great memories. Miriam has been a nurse for eleven years; she works at a hospital in Nairobi. Even before the pandemic nurses were already facing challenges, for instance, lack of equipment and resources, poor pay. The average net salary of a nurse practitioner in Kenya is Kwsh 41,000, which is equivalent to \$400. The highest paid nurse receives Ksh 144,928, which is equivalent to \$1,353. Miriam mentioned to me that she has to work long hours; ten to eleven hours during the day and 15 hours when she has to work the night shift. She laments how there is a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as most of the hospital resources are directed to the section of the hospital that deals with COVID-19 patients. Her greatest fear is that she might bring the infection back home. Seth Panyaco the Secretary General of the Kenya National Union of

Uhuru park in Nairobi with the central business district in the background.



Imgard Rop, Esperanza staff member, out with her husband and children before the pandemic. She wrote about working from home in the May issue of *La Voz*.

Nurses told local media that out of 100,000 health workers only a fraction had received training on how to protect themselves. A few weeks ago, one of the hospitals in Nairobi, went on a go-slow in protest of lack of PPE and training. The National Council of Nursing of Kenya describes nurses as the backbone of health-care and implores employers to ensure that nurses have personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to running water to assist them to safely execute their duties.

According to Miriam, she has taken up another profession, that of a teacher. On March 15, 2020 the Government of Kenya ordered all schools and colleges to be closed, the Ministry of Education introduced electronic and digital lessons titled "*Out of classroom learning*" which was designed and implemented by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). Miriam tells me that she is helping her kids with their schoolwork and in areas where she is not able to understand the content she contacts the teacher for guidance. She has noticed that she is spending more on data bundles to ensure that her children get the educational materials that they need. According to a report prepared by the Kenya Ministry of Education titled, *Kenyan Basic Education COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan*, states that the pandemic has disrupted learning for over 18 million learners in Kenya which is a threat to attainment of Sustainable Development Goal



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number four which is set to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Lack of Internet, smartphones and laptops has made it hard for students to access learning materials. In addition, the cost of data bundles and frequent power blackouts make it even harder to learn at home. The approach that the Ministry of Education is using for distance learning shows major disparities within the education system.

When we were in high school Miriam was determined to make it to the national championship, which she did. As she explained to me the challenges that she was facing, I could sense the same determination that she had as a table tennis player. I know she will continue to care for her patients and her family irrespective of the challenges that she is facing. As we celebrate Nurses and those working in the frontline, I think about family and friends whom I know who work in this field and haven't had a chance to ask them how they are doing during this pandemic. I want to take this opportunity to let them know that they are in my thoughts and I now understand why this profession chose them.

*I had to use alias to protect the identity of the subject.



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Coronavirus Pandemic

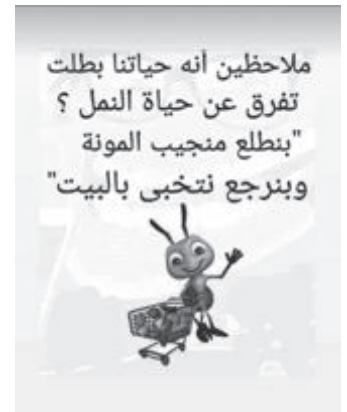
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those who find themselves in the best of possible worlds when fear and suffering are rampant? Like the companies profiteering from the pandemic as millions lose their jobs.

What gives me some hope is not how states deal with this crisis, but rather the transformations in ideas, organizing, activism and the imagination that can happen as millions of people interact with the crisis. The world had already been in the throes of a crisis characterized by loss of direction and lack of alternatives, as though we're imprisoned in an eternal present, as Syrian writer Yassin al-Haj Saleh puts it. Changing the model of how we organize work, the economy and knowledge should not be an impossible task. The more dangerous moment perhaps is not when the pandemic is at its

peak, but when it retreats and we ask ourselves now what—only to discover that we are back to business as usual. The emergence of new movements and ideas will create a political and moral turning point that we need to rescue ourselves.

BIO: Nadine Saliba, born in Lebanon, immigrated with her family to San Antonio. She has an MA in Political Theory and International Relations. Imane collaborated with her sister on this article about their family.



This meme translates as: Have you noticed how we've become like ants? We leave the house to get food and go back to hide at home.