P E T E R   B A E H R

Social extremity, communities of fate, and the sociology of SARS

> [...] The uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side. (Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon*)

F E W   E P I S O D E S in recent times have proved so rich in surprises as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) saga of spring 2003 (1). Among a number of oddities, consider for the moment just one. Only weeks before the SARS crisis publicly erupted in March 2003, the United Nations was in acrimonious disarray. A divided Security Council had failed to agree on strategies to disarm Saddam Hussein and to impede a war against him. Yet just as pundits were announcing the death of the UN, SARS suddenly gave one branch of it – the World Health Organization (WHO) – renewed energy and respectability. It is the most basic axiom of international relations that states are jealous to preserve their prerogatives and "sovereignty'', of insisting that other countries and organizations do not meddle in their internal affairs. But the Global Alert and Respiratory Unit of the WHO managed not only to forge an unprecedented degree of cooperation among disease laboratories scattered across the planet; it was also able to elevate itself to the extraordinary position of global judge and jury. Governments – in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore and Canada – quaked at its pronouncements, feared its travel advisories and pleaded to be released from them. To use a ubiquitous metaphor of the time, the "war'' against SARS was the epitome of the UN ideal: a worthy defense against a common, unequivocal foe, under the auspices of a truly pan-national organization.

This article examines SARS's impact on Hong Kong, a territory whose global importance is disproportionate to its size of 980 square kilometers and population of almost seven million (2). A logistics hub that has become simultaneously a disease hub, transporting pathogens such as the SARS coronavirus around the world, Hong Kong's condition cannot be one of indifference to the international system as a whole (3). Moreover, something happened in Hong Kong that provides us with a new, or at least re-fashioned, concept for sociological theory. A chief objective in what follows is to delineate a social phenomenon, a child of ordeal and emergency, that became vivid in Hong Kong during the spring of 2003 but which is by no means an unparalleled event: the formation of "a community of fate" that both amplified political "voice" and increased the ratio of alert to inert denizens (cf. Hirschman 1970, p. 24).

I begin by delineating the key concept of this paper, "community of fate"; proceed to apply it to Hong Kong in the spring of 2003; and then examine its significance for sociology. Of special pertinence is the nature of social ritual, what may be called "efface work", in a masked city fearful of bodily contact and co-presence. I shall argue that mask culture under these conditions promotes emotional contagion, while keeping disease contagion at bay.

(2) Current economic data on Hong Kong, often with international rankings, can be found in the Hong Kong Year-book published by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government. It is also available online at [http://www.info.gov.hk/yearbook/]. On Hong Kong's foreign reserves see [http://info.gov.hk/hkma/eng/press/1997/970919e.html].

On trade: [http://info.gov.hk/censtatd/eng/hkstat/fas/ex-trade/trade3/trade3.htm]. Regionally, the power of Hong Kong is immense. Over the last two decades, Hong Kong has been the biggest contributor to the Chinese mainland's foreign direct investment; in 2003 it supplied one-third of it. Hong Kong companies now employ in Guang-dong province approximately 12 million workers. Hong Kong is also part of the Pearl River Delta, a region that boasts a GDP of more than $270 billion, and which is the world's sixteenth biggest economy and tenth largest exporter. See "Asia Ascending", *Economist* June 11, 2005, p. 80; also "A Strong Tailwind", *Business Week* [Asian Edition]) Sept. 8, 2003, p. 23.

(3) It was on ships arriving from Hong Kong that bubonic plague first entered the United States. Honolulu and San Francisco were struck in 1899. Within a decade the disease had reached Texas and Florida. It has never been entirely eliminated from continental America.

Community of Fate Defined

To most readers of this article, "community of fate" will be an arcane notion. Social scientists who employ it do so sparingly, and almost in passing, as in the distinction between communities of choice (better off neighborhoods able to maximize security and safety) and communities of fate (poor neighborhoods, with fewer resources to defend themselves against crime and other social injuries) (4). Communitarian writers appear to have no place for it in their casuistries (5). Nor does the master of the sustained, inflected definition, Erving Goffman, who summons "community of fate" only to render it as little more than a synonym for collegiality (6). Even a book that contains the concept in its title avoids fleshing out its meaning; on that reckoning, community of fate is tantamount to risk society (Marske 1991) (7).

In the following discussion, community of fate is a term that depicts a process of group formation under extreme duress. It refers to a pattern of temporary social cohesion arising from a mass emergency or "disaster". Many sociologists since Durkheim and Mauss have observed that "institutions have a tendency to reveal themselves when they are stressed and in crisis" (Klinenberg 2002, p. 23). Communities of fate are rather different: they *come into being* as a result of stress and crisis, instantiating a mode of life that hitherto was only nascent, and interrupting the complacent doze of routine. They are also socially productive and consequential, which means capable of collective action for the brief time they are in existence. Quintessentially local, symbolically and materially bounded, community of fate is not to be confused with "risk society" which depicts something chronic rather than acute, general rather than particular, modern rather than trans-temporal, and vaguely recognized by its recipients rather than being viscerally grasped. Community of fate falls under the aegis of conflict, social ritual and resource mobilization theories many of whose dynamics it accordingly shares.

(4) Hope 2001 p. 214.

(5) However, Selznick's sophisticated treatment of community as a variable, rather than as an all-encompassing set of social relationships, does invoke the notion of a "common faith or fate" (Selznick 1992, p. 358).

(6) Colleagues, for Goffman (1974 [1959], pp. 158-159) are defined as "persons who present the same routine to the same kind of audience but who do not participate together, as team mates do, at the same time and place before the same particular audience". He adds that "whatever their tongues, they come to speak the same social language".

(7) On fate's relationship to risk, see Beck 1986, pp. 53-54.

"Fate" in this context denotes an unwanted, yet socially recognized, emergency which confronts people with a major challenge to their existence (8). If people possess resources, including organization and leadership, if there are one or more axes on which their interests can converge, they are in principle able to grapple with this fate actively and purposefully. "Community" refers to the sense that, other divisions and interests notwithstanding, agents recognize a common danger, face an uncertain and diffuse menace, and are able collectively to do something about it. This is not the same as saying that everyone feels exactly the same way, behaves the same way, or has the same death chances, a recapitulation of "mechanical solidarity" (9). It is to affirm, however, that a common focus of sustained attention, and an intense feeling of horizontal interconnectedness, is essential (10).

Concatenated "pockets of solidarity" (Collins 2004, p. 41), communities of fate are of smaller or larger size. What quintessentially typifies them is a powerful sense of group membership (as distinct from a spasm of altruism) which generates, and via feedback requires, group symbols and energies. Where all hope is gone, resources "spent" and action deemed hopeless, communities of fate are impossible. Candidates for such communities include ravaged towns, besieged cities, and quarantined areas, yet neither depredation, nor siege, nor *cordon sanitaire* is sufficient for a community of fate to form. Manifest for a shorter or longer period of time, a community of fate never imagines itself to be living in "normal times". On the contrary, it experiences time as a rupture with the recent past: the biblical kairos whose break with linearity jolts people into new or intensified ways of feeling. That sensibility is also epitomized by the stirring lines of the ancient Sumarian/Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh:

(8) The term "community of fate" (as *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) appears in Weber (1964 [1922], pp. 316, 675, 740; and 1968 [1922], pp. 398, 923, 1007), and is advanced at length in Bauer (2000 [1907/1924]), as part of a discussion of nationhood.

(9) Unlike mechanical solidarity, predicated on anatomical and functional resemblance, communities of fate can be highly stratified. Equally, while mechanical solidarity refers to an extant, preestablished group of everyday life, a community of fate is a group in the making. It emerges through trial and

conflict and evaporates once these conditions disappear.

(10) Though not necessarily the "horizontal comradeship" or "fraternity" of which Anderson (1991 [1983], p. 7) writes. Despite the cachet that "imagined communities" has received over the years, I avoid this circular concept. Not just the nation but all communities – all social relations – are "imagined" in some sense or other because they are mediated by thought. But then again thought is itself the mediated expression of social relations.

Enkidu was weakened, could not run as before,
but now he had reason, and wide understanding.
(Epic of Gilgamesh I pp. 200-201; Standard Version)

The above portrait hints at, but does not describe rigorously, the
seven factors that produce a community of fate. Let me now turn to
these explicitly using the SARS crisis in Hong Kong as an exemplary
case.

SARS in Hong Kong: Sociology of an Epidemic Disease

The British handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of
China (PRC) in July 1997 was supposed to herald a new chapter in the
territory's history, combining economic prosperity with growing attach-
ment to the Motherland. Instead, Hong Kong's retrocession to the PRC
coincided with the Asian financial meltdown, aggravated further by a
newly installed government that appeared to lack the rudiments of good
governance (11). Already before SARS appeared in late February 2003,
triggering three months of fear, 1,755 cases, and 299 deaths, Hong Kong
was a troubled place (12). Yet its travails had been largely segmental in
character, affecting different groups in somewhat different ways or
concentrating misfortune on a minority. Economic recession and
downsizing throw some people out of employment, while others retain
their jobs. A period of deflation may damage retailers, but for customers
whose wages and salaries remain stable or increase, there are bargains to
be had. Falling property prices – they lost around two-thirds of their
market value in five years – affect only that minority in Hong Kong who
are in the private housing market. Avian flu destroyed the livestock of
chicken farmers and sellers, but there is always other meat to buy and,
in extremis, other professions to pursue. In contrast, SARS affected
everyone more or less simultaneously (13). It announced a collective,

(11) Good governance in Hong Kong
is itself impeded by the structure
imposed on it by the Basic Law, the city's
so-called mini-constitution. Hong
Kong's political system is one of
"authoritarian toleration". I attempt a
detailed analysis of its vulnerabilities in
Baehr 2004. For a convenient edition of
the Basic Law, see Chan and Clark 1991.
(12) Given that influenza alone kills
around 20,000 people each year in the

United States, the official number of
SARS' combined fatalities *in all countries*
– 774 – looks unimpressive. Yet this is
hindsight. At the time, because SARS
was a new virus, epidemiological extra-
polation was impossible; no one knew
what the final death tally would be.
(13) For economic data on SARS's
immediate impact, see Cheung and
Sung (2003), and Brown (2003). Useful
sources on the outbreak are: DeGolyer

rather than an idiosyncratic fate, a dramatic rupture with quotidian existence rather than, as with illnesses such as cancer or heart disease, yet another statistic of everyday death (14).

To assume the characteristics of a community of fate at least seven factors must conjoin. In the first place, a community of fate requires danger recognition: people's understanding that they are faced by a hazard so pressing, so immediate *and so evident* as to demand their urgent attention (15). They must be aware of the peril that confronts them – not aware of all its implications (an impossibility), but sufficiently knowledgeable to comprehend that they are in the midst of a menace that threatens their very existence. Without that recognition, a human group may be destroyed or decimated innocent of what has hit it, as was the case with the South East Asian areas struck by the earthquake – induced tsunami in December 2004. Indonesia, one of the affected countries, is no stranger to similar kinds of natural catastrophe. Ten weeks before the volcanic island of Krakatoa erupted on August 27 1883, killing over 40,000 people, it produced ominous signs of the deluge it would later unleash. Residents of Batavia (Jakarta) felt disconcerting vibrations they had never before experienced. A recent chronicler of the events nicely sums up the phenomenology of danger recognition:

> There had been a curious trajectory about each person's morning on that day. They had awakened to the unusual sounds, and they had been merely puzzled. By the time they breakfasted, they had become concerned. The Christians among them had gone off to their churches, feeling moderately alarmed. After matins they had ventured back out on to the streets, by now in their droves, and they were, at least privately, in moods that were at first quite agitated and, as the thunder wore on, very apprehensive indeed. (Winchester 2003, p. 163)

Yet two days later "after its alarming opening salvo, the island quietened down again" (Winchester 2003, p. 169). Life returned to normal. People resumed their professions and distractions. The talk of

(2003), Fidler (2004), Lee (2003) and Loh *et al* (2003). The documents of three public enquiries are also invaluable: see SARS Expert Committee 2003; Hospital Authority 2003; Legislative Council of Hong Kong 2004.

(14) As Abraham (2004, pp. 52-53) remarks, "Earlier crises [in Hong Kong] had brought political and economic uncertainty... But now, in addition to all this, there was something new. There was the elemental fear of illness and death. And no one seemed to be exempt. It was

not just those in crowded housing estates who were falling ill. The powerful and wealthy were also at risk... In those dark days in March, SARS seemed to be a disease that could strike anyone, any-time".

(15) Recognition of an emergency is typically a processual, rather than a spontaneous, act of cognition. For an acute analysis of its dynamics, see Bobbitt (2002, p. 427) who itemizes its five stages: notice, definition, decision, assignment, and implementation.

the town was the much heralded visit of Wilson's Great Circus. Danger-recognition lapsed. The forces that would smash Krakatoa to smithereens – the dynamics of tectonics, subductions, fault-zones and sea-floor spread – were unknown at this time. When the volcanic island did finally blow up, hurling devastating tsunamis at its neighbors, it was too late for action or flight.

Danger recognition thus has its own micro-moments: it may be activated, falter, reassert itself or abate once more. In the case of SARS in Hong Kong, with an advanced communication system, a crisis was evident to most people from around March 19 2003 onwards (16), possibly before, dramatized by a daily recorded death toll, a government call to arms on March 24 in which citizens were enjoined to combat the disease, and by the WHO travel advisory against non-essential visits to Hong Kong and Guangdong issued on April 2.

Second, the formation of a community of fate requires not only danger recognition but also moral density, namely, a pervasive and intense feeling of social interconnectedness in which people are aware of a common predicament and a common interest that stretches beyond the family unit. Moral density, in this adaptation of Durkheim, is not identical to altruism which is only one – and probably the rarest – of its modalities. It is enough that people believe their own fate is tied up with others close to them and that emotional contagion (in this case, of fear and anxiety) sweeps through their collective life. I will describe the mechanism of this contagion presently, when I discuss "efface work''.

Even so, danger recognition and moral density are insufficient factors to elicit a community of fate. Pertinent, too, is the length of time the emergency lasts: an isolated event may shake a people from its slumber, but is unlikely to instill the necessary vitality to keep it awake. Another way of putting this is to say that communities of fate are formed by *trial* rather than by *shock* (or awe), by sustained, chronic ordeal rather than by acute anguish – unless, of course, a shock repeats itself periodically in which case it takes on the features of a trial. In Hong Kong that ordeal was recapitulated daily in the reports of new infections, but was given added drama by a series of events that over a two month period brought home the gravity of the situation: the outbreak around March 11 in the Prince of Wales Hospital Ward 8a, which affected more than 20 health-care workers; the Amoy Gardens infections of late March-early April which ended up killing 42 people and which catalyzed the WHO travel advisory; the report on April 8 of SARS among 27 families in the Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate, a building complex across the road from Amoy

(16) When the first five SARS deaths were confirmed.

Gardens provoking fears that the disease was becoming airborne or being carried by vectors such as rats and cockroaches; the much publicized and grieved death on May 13 of Joanna Tse Yuen-man, the young and vulnerable doctor who volunteered to work in a SARS unit in Tuen Mun public hospital and who came to symbolize all that Hong Kong people admired (17); an outbreak in late May at the Lek Yuen Estate in Sha Tin in which eleven residents, including a four-month-old baby, were infected; the search, again in late May, for guests who had stayed earlier in the month at Harbour Plaza Hotel where one of their number had gone down with SARS. And these were only the major local events which kept hearts racing. Meanwhile, the Chinese mainland was in pandemonium; Beijing was not removed from the WHO's list of SARS affected areas until June 24. So despite the general fall in SARS' casualties revealed in Figure 1, new outbreaks – represented by small graphical spikes – kept Hong Kong people on tenterhooks.

Fourth, a community of fate is formed where people feel compelled to stand their ground, where there is little, if any, chance of flight or of individual escape from the common lot and where they experience their predicament as collective exile (18). This situation may be called closure. Accompanying it is social condensation as energies that would normally be dissipated are concentrated in one place. Closure is unusual. When, in 1894, a bubonic plague epidemic hit Hong Kong, the bulk of the Chinese population – around 100,000 – simply fled. That response was repeated exactly a century later in the north Indian city of Surat where news of plague sparked a mass exodus of half a million that included most of the medical profession (Marriott 2002, p. 51) (19). Furthermore, Hong Kong society balkanized in 1894 along racial and ethnic lines. White colonists and Chinese workers, xenophobic mirrors both, blamed each other for the crisis; clung to opposed therapeutic diagnoses and remedies; and were granted different medical facilities (Marriott 2002, pp. 53-62). Attempts at effective quarantine collapsed (Welsh 1996, pp. 302-307). The situation was radically different
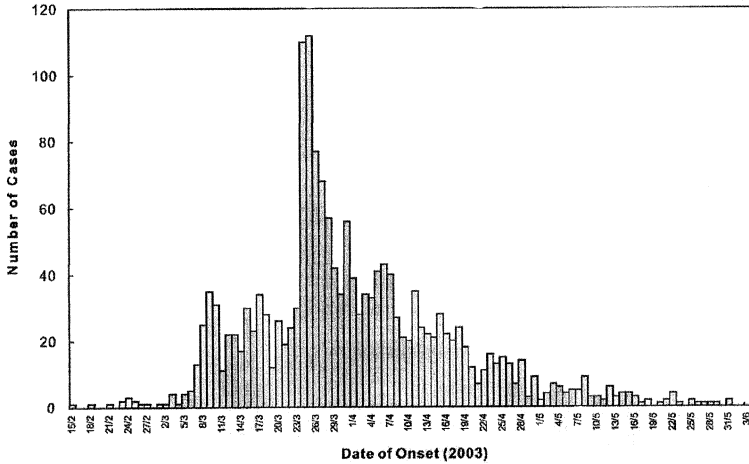
(17) Eight health-care workers died from SARS, of whom six worked in the public sector. The deaths of the public sector medical staff received enormous amounts of publicity. The six were doctors Joanna Tse Yuen-man, 35 y.o., and Kate Cheng Ha-yan, 30 y.o., male nurse Lau Wing-kai, 38 y.o., and three health-care assistants, Wong Kang-tai, 58 y.o., Tang Heung-may, 36 y.o., and Lau Kam-yung, 47 y.o. James Lau Tai-kwan, 56 y.o., and Thomas Cheung Sik-hin, 58 y.o., were the two private doctors who died.

(18) The experience of exile and isolation is the leitmotif of Albert Camus's *The Plague*. See Camus (2001 [1947]) pp. 53, 56-58,138-139, etc.

(19) When the plague struck Bombay in 1897, approximately 380,000 people (half the city's population) retreated to the hinterland (Marriott 2002, p. 201).

Date of Onset (2003)

FIGURE I

with SARS in 2003. Then it was mostly expatriate families that left briefly, ethnic divisions were insignificant, and modern medical science – through the agency of hospital doctors – received common approval.

It is true that Hong Kong people are notoriously peripatetic. Around 7 % of them have right of abode in other countries, while around 43 % have close relatives living elsewhere, thus affording a temporary foreign refuge. But moving is easier said than done when employment continues and when local family commitments must be redeemed. Many cities on the Chinese mainland were demonstrably unwelcoming of Hong Kong visitors. And in Toronto, a home from home for many Hong Kongers, even relatives often stated in so many words: "Stay away for the moment; don't put us in danger too''.

Moreover, the implications of closure became more pointed still when they took institutional forms. Salient examples included the travel advisory of April 2, the first on Hong Kong ever issued by the WHO, which had a severe, if temporary, dampening affect on economic activity (20); the Swiss government's prohibition, on the same day, of Hong

(20) Over 3,800 businesses folded between March and the beginning of June, and Hong Kong's unemployment rate, at around 9 %, was the highest since 1975. SARS's impact on tourism (the occupancy rate fell to 20 % in April and May), airlines (Cathay Pacific's usual figure of 33,000 passengers a day fell to around 4,000 in April and May), consumer spending, and the property

Kong exhibitors (and those from other SARS affected countries) from participation in the Basel World Watch and Jewelry Show; the announcement on May 7 from the University of California, Berkeley, that students from countries on the WHO's travel advisory list would not be allowed to attend the summer school program (21); and the request, soon afterwards from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, the University of Rochester, in New York, and Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, that students in SARS areas skip their graduation ceremonies. That was not the end of it. Reed Exhibitions, the organizers of the world's premier jewelry trade show in Los Angeles, first banned Hong Kong exhibitors from attendance, then allowed them to do so on condition that a separate pavilion be built for them, and finally demurred to full participation provided the luckless jewelers left Hong Kong ten days early, received health checks 48 hours before entering the fair and presented up-to-date health certificates. Meanwhile on May 16, the Hong Kong government was informed by its Irish counterparts that Hong Kong athletes were debarred from participating in the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games (22). From an outsider's point of view, such constraints and interdictions are reasonable precautionary measures designed to protect the citizens of host countries. But from the standpoint of many Hong Kong residents, they suggested that "Asia's world city" had become an international outlaw.

Above I listed four ingredients that constitute a community of fate: *danger recognition* (alertness based on verified public knowledge of the disease); *moral density* (aided by the fact that SARS, albeit unequally, ran its course through all major districts of Hong Kong); *trial* rather than shock; and *closure* with its attendant stigmatization by other nations. These are all necessary conditions for a community of fate to be formed. Additional requirements include *material and organizational resources* to resist the menace (for instance, a combative media in Hong Kong's case), and an *axis of convergence* (notably a common language, civic pride and so forth) along which social cohesion is affirmed. The existence of such an axis can never be simply assumed. Consider Montreal during the smallpox outbreak in 1885. At the time of the epidemic, Montreal boasted a city population of around 167,000 people; the suburbs

market, are detailed in Cheung and Sung (2003) and Brown (2003).

(21) After protest from the WHO, the decision was rescinded on May 17.

(22) The decision was reversed on June 7 (subject to quarantine conditions) but for three weeks this incident provoked a hue and cry in the Hong Kong media, aggravated by the pathos that the athletes in question were physically impaired.

accounted for some 30,000 more. Like Hong Kong, Montreal was a commercial hub of the region. Unlike Hong Kong, where SARS produced a community of fate, smallpox in Montreal only accentuated previous divisions. The city fractured along lines of ethnicity (Anglo-Irish/French), confession (Protestant/Roman Catholic), language (Anglophone/Francophone), and neighbourhood (East End/West End). No axis of convergence materialized, even though Montreal had the resources and know-how to tackle the disease. Even treatment of the disease sowed discord: a rump of miasmatic doctors claimed that vaccination was pernicious. At this time, the germ theory of disease was still in its infancy (23).

By contrast, territory-wide identification in Hong Kong was facilitated by a most propitious axis of convergence: ethnic homogeneity. Of Hong Kong's population of 6.82 million (mid-2003 government figures), around 93% are ethnic Chinese, approximately 60% were

(23) Yet perhaps matters are more complex that I am making them appear. My account of Montreal relies on the study by Michael Bliss (2003 [1991]), a noted Canadian historian of medicine who emphasizes the city's social dissension. But perhaps another investigation, guided by the model proposed here, might show that Montreal did contain one or more communities of fate. On that account, we would not treat the city of Montreal as a single unit, but examine instead the inner dynamics of the East and West sides. Another example might be San Francisco's Chinatown – "a tenth of the city terraced into twelve tiny blocks" (Chase 2003, p. 11) – during the plague epidemic of 1900. Chinese residents (virtually all males) were cordoned off, quarantined, and vilified as being responsible for the disease. Distinctive looks, diet and attire – the typical queue or pigtail was emblematic of residual Manchu loyalty – physically set apart this group from its Caucasian neighbors. Yet local authorities such as the powerful merchant-based Chinese Benevolent Association, and the Chinese consul, Ho Yow, ensconced in his official Chinatown residence, spoke up for their country folk and defended their interests. Perhaps there are also occasions in which communities of fate exist as a nested structure much like a series of Russian *matryoshka* dolls. These are intriguing possibilities that only research, and greater analytical precision, could substantiate. But they do not negate the concept I am developing here; they simply extend its implications and lend it a more realistic air. They suggest, plausibly, that communities of fate have macro, meso and micro expressions. Or, to use a different language, that communities of fate may form in both "cellular", relatively homogenous entities, and "spectral" ones which cut across many divisions. For sociological purposes, the latter are far more intriguing and for an obvious reason: the more solidaristic a social group is to begin with, the less it requires greater solidarity to cope with a parlous condition. Defensive consolidation of a pre-existing pattern is quite different from group formation of a new one. In contrast, the more spectral the group that becomes a community of fate – essentially the more strangers it composes and the more stratified its occupational, confessional and civic life – the more remarkable it is. The city as a whole is thus a legitimate level of focus to the extent that one sees it as a "parent community" (Jacobs 1989 [1961], p. 118; cf. p. 30) in relation to its districts and neighborhoods, or as a "complex social system of integrated institutions that touch *and* interpenetrate in a variety of ways" (Klinenberg 2002, p. 22, emphasis in the original).

T A B L E I

Hong Kong Transition Project Data Set

The following is a list of how you might describe yourself. Which is the most appropriate description of yourself ? (All figures shown in percentages [%])

Surveys (Dates Conducted)	Hong Kong Chinese	Chinese	Hong Kong Person	Hong Kong British	Overseas Chinese	Others	N
April Post-Budget Address Survey 2004 (30 Mar – 7 Apr 2004)	27.5	25.7	41.6	2.2	1	2	710
Nov District Council Election Survey 2003	24.8	25	44.6	3	0.8	1.8	709
June SARS Survey 2003	27.4	19.2	45.4	3.4	1.4	3.2	776
Feb Pre-Budget Address Survey 2003	21.9	24.1	45.3	2.7	2.3	3.7	790
April Post-Budget Address Survey 2002	26.8	24.5	43	2.7	0.9	2.1	751
November Post-Policy Address Survey 2001	25.8	23.1	44.4	3.4	1.3	2	759
July Patriotism Survey 2001	23.8	28.4	41.8	2.9	1.3	1.8	831
July Party Survey 2001	25.6	26.7	41.4	2.4	0.9	3	1029
June Media Survey 2001	24.9	23.7	44.9	2.9	1.2	2.4	830
April Post-Budget Address Survey 2001	24.1	28	41.7	2.7	1.7	1.8	837
October Post-LegCo Election Survey 2000	25.8	25.9	43.6	2.5	0.7	1.5	721
August Pre-LegCo Election Survey 2000	26.5	23	43.4	3.7	1.9	1.5	857
April Post-Budget Address Survey 2000	29.5	24.1	38.2	4.5	1	2.7	704

born in the territory, and the vast majority of residents are Cantonese speakers, the language associated with Guangdong Province. More- over, the cultural identity of Hong Kongers is strong. Respondents asked by the Hong Kong Transition Project to choose among various self-ascribed identities – as Chinese, as Hong Kong Chinese, or as a Hong Kong person – have repeatedly affirmed attachment to the last designation (Hong Kong person) or to one that combines a sense of place and of ethnicity (Hong Kong Chinese). Self-descriptions of being simply "Chinese'' – correlating with mainland patriotism – have only intermittently garnered more than 25% of responses, though this may be changing as residents continue to lose confi- dence in their own territory's government and perceive the successes of the PRC under a pragmatic and relatively effective administra- tion (24).

(24) Table 1 shows no significant rise in the number of people who described themselves as Hong Kong persons in the Hong Kong Transition Project's June

Finally, *social ritual* is also critical in galvanizing a community of fate's collective life. This can take many different forms but its consequence is always the same: by providing a specific identity, relevant to the crisis community, it separates the group both from normal life and from the world of the unaffected. Let us call social ritual during the Hong Kong SARS crisis "efface work" – the activity of wearing a mask in public places.

Efface Work and the Mass Media

> One's face, then, is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one. (Goffman 1967 [1955], p. 19)

SARS can be understood epidemiologically as a virus that tested Hong Kong's health care system and governance to the maximum. Sociologically it can be seen as a test of Hong Kong's moral existence: how the city and its environs coped with fear. The ancient notion that plague is a sign of evil is no primitive superstition. It grasps the reality that any threat to the group as a whole is simultaneously a "sacred" violatory event of the most extreme kind (see Gordon 1999, p. 7). The specter of plague or any other pandemic summons up the possibility of a collective death: the extirpation of the social itself.

Aside from the new institutions it generates (civic and government initiatives, pressure groups, etc.), how does one recognize a community of fate and delineate its existence? Durkheim (1933 [1893], pp. 64-69) claimed to find the index of forms of solidarity in law and attitudes towards punishment and compensation. One vital index of a community of fate, I suggest, is to be found in the "social language" (Goffman 1974 [1959], p. 159), symbols and "codes of representation" (25) that people use to describe their predicament. More precisely, a community of fate can be located by investigating *what* people saliently speak about; *how* they speak about it i.e. with what terms and metaphors; and with *what sensibility*.

SARS survey (2003). However it does show a brief, but untypical, decline in those describing themselves simply as "Chinese".

(25) On community of fate as a "code of representation" see Bauer 2000 [1907/1924], p. 99.

Elsewhere, I examine this language, particularly its Chinese articulation, in some detail. Here I will only sketch its main dimensions. What Hong Kong people spoke about was the disease itself. Was it abating or spreading? What could be done to stop it? How safe were one's children and relatives? Should domestic helpers be permitted to leave their employers' apartments for the usual Sunday gatherings in Central (the financial and government district) and elsewhere? By definition, this is not the usual language of everyday life but when it momentarily becomes so it articulates by repetition the new reality. How did Hong Kong residents speak about SARS? Short of a genuine ethnography, we cannot be certain. But in both Chinese and English language media, metaphors of war were pervasive. Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, announced early on that "we [government ministers] are confident that we [Hong Kong people] will win the war'' (26). Nurses and doctors were described ubiquitously, by government officials, media and citizens as "front line'' workers (*qianxian*) and, albeit with militaristic hyperbole, as "troops'' (*jundui*) that are "marching through the fog'' (27). Hong Kong's premier English-language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*, organized "Operation Shield'' to raise funds for the "embattled'' medics. Medals were dispensed to the dead; their bodies buried in Gallant Garden.

Much of this disease-as-war language was government and media "frame''. Its plausibility in the popular imagination can only be conjectured. More evident is Hong Kong's response to its "heroes'', a term widely used during the outbreak to describe medical staff who died trying to protect others. And here we approach the issue of moral sensibility. For at the same time that Hong Kong people were bitterly criticizing their own government for what they deemed to be its general incompetence, their hearts went out to those in the front line. Georg Simmel (1950 [1908], pp. 387-388) reminds us that gratitude is an emotionally charged form of giving, supplementing the legal order; unlike monetary exchange, it is "practical and impulsive''. He adds that although gratitude "may remain, of course something internal, it may yet engender new actions''. It forms part of "the moral memory of mankind''. That memory is today discernible in the bronze busts, titular scholarships, and commemorations through which Hong Kong people now recall the deceased health workers.

(26) *Ta Kung Po*, 28 March/03, A01 (reporter's name not cited). Chinese has various terms for war and battle, notably *zhang* and *zhan*.

(27) *Apple Daily* 17 March/03, A02 (reporters Leung Shun-yu, Chui Doi-ling, Chui Wan-ting, and Lai Ka-kui).

If language was one key medium through which people communicated a danger to their own existence as individuals and to the mortality of the society of which they were part, social ritual was another. Here I am less concerned with the persistence of established rituals than I am with the emergence of new ones, peculiar to the situation itself. Durkheim argued in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]), that social solidarity requires the existence of bodies in close and regular interaction, face-to-face encounters, to charge up a sense of a common reality. In a powerful recent adaptation of this argument, Randall Collins (2004, p. 41) glosses:

> Society is held together more intensely at some moments than at others. And the "society" that is held together is no abstract unity of a social system, but is just those groups of people assembled in particular places who feel solidarity with each other through the effects of ritual participation and ritually charged symbolism.

Of particular importance, in Collins's theory, is what he calls "emotional energy": the variable confidence, élan, initiative and purposefulness which people derive from ritual interactions and which by social disposition they seek to maximize. Emotional energy is localized and situation specific; it is most intense at the moment of the ritual itself, tending to drain away thereafter unless and until it is periodically renewed. It both belongs to and, in feedback loops, constitutes a ritual encounter. In a figure that schematizes the ritual process, Collins (p. 48) itemizes its four necessary ingredients: group assembly (bodily co-presence), barrier to outsiders, mutual focus of attention and shared mood (28). Let us apply these ingredients to the Hong Kong case.

What kind of society was Hong Kong during the SARS crisis? I am not thinking here of intensive units of interaction such as health workers – or New York firefighters in the aftermath of 9/11 – who handled the crisis around the clock, lived together for weeks on end so as to avoid infecting their own families and who, by so doing, intensified the bonds of their own solidarity pocket. My interest is in the wider society, the ostensible spectators on events, as it were. What, if anything, distinguished it symbolically from its previous social character? A shared mood of trepidation was one feature, aggravated by the fact that SARS was a new virus for which there was no known cure and that mutated in unpredictable ways. A mutual focus of attention was another factor, centered on daily (sometimes hourly) updates of SARS casualty

(28) Collins's sociology of the emotions extends Durkheim and Goffman, but also builds on a burgeoning literature e.g. Barbalet 1998, Katz 1999 and Scheff 1990.

statistics, and information about where the disease was spreading. And there was a double barrier to outsiders: one elected by foreigners who stopped coming to Hong Kong; the other generated, under pressure, among Hong Kongers themselves for whom domestic strangers – and even intimates – became a source of jeopardy as unwitting carriers of the pestilence. Where, then, was the group-assembly, the close interaction that gives people a sense of belonging? Had it momentarily disappeared? Or was there still some means by which it made an appearance? Disease repels people from contact. It puts a premium on co-absence. By minimizing bodily contact it must also attenuate solidarity and moral density, and thereby the presence of society itself. The reality is more complex.

In a seminal essay, Erving Goffman coined the term "face work" to exemplify the many ways that individuals publicly challenge, apologize, cooperate and forgive one another in situations of co-presence. "A person's performance of face work, extended by his tacit agreement to help others perform theirs, represents his willingness to abide by the ground rules of social interaction" (Goffman 1967 [1955], p. 31). For Goffman, the self consists not just as an assemblage of "expressive implications" but also as "a kind of player in a ritual game who copes honorably or dishonorably, diplomatically or undiplomatically, with the judgmental contingencies of the situation" (p. 31). "By repeatedly and automatically asking himself the question: 'If I do or do not act in this way, will I or others lose face?', he decides at each moment, consciously or unconsciously, how to behave" (p. 36). As is well known, Chinese culture attributes an especial importance to "face" and its requirements (29). The paradox of *efface* work begins, however, with the face out of sight. Disease, too, is faceless, invisible, unlike a marauding army, a volcanic lava flow, a tsunami wave, or the violently swaying trees that announce the arrival of a hurricane. And the more mysterious it is, the more a disease is likely to induce generalized hypochondria. All kinds of sundry illnesses are read as its symptoms: diarrhea, coughing, fever.

Disease in Hong Kong is a remarkable laboratory to examine how even in situations of social repulsion a collective existence is affirmed. Isolation has its social patterns and consequences. Granted, where possible, people in Hong Kong vacated the usual packed public spaces: shopping malls, restaurants, churches, and cinemas. But for the most

(29) Significantly, the first footnote of Goffman's "Face-Work" essay is devoted to Chinese conceptions of face. For a more recent analysis, see Bond 1991, pp. 58-71.

part flight was impossible. People still went to work and, for at least half of the period in which SARS was active, to school and to university. Those without their own vehicles (the majority) were compelled to employ public transport. Thus bodies remained co-present for much of the time. Families still met, even if there was reluctance to keep up contact with elder members – the key target group of SARS deaths.

In a masked city it was difficult to recognize the identity even of one's friends and colleagues as they passed. Yet mask wearing became the quickly improvised, if obligatory, social ritual; failing to don one was met with righteous indignation, a clear sign of ritual violation. The mask symbolized a rule of conduct: namely an *obligation* to protect the wider community; and an *expectation* regarding how one was to be treated by others (Goffman 1967 [1956], p. 49). More simply, the mask was the emblematic means by which people communicated their responsibilities to the social group of which they were members. Through mimicry and synchronization – key mechanisms of emotional contagion (Hatfield *et al*. 1994, pp. 156-158) – mask wearing amounted to a joint action, normatively embodied, the entrainment and attunement of the society as a whole. By disguising an individual's face, it gave greater salience to collective identity. By blurring social distinctions, it produced social resemblance. Mask wearing activated and reactivated a sense of a common fate; it was a mode of reciprocity under conditions that supremely tested it. Accordingly, mask demeanor was much more than a prophylactic against disease. It showed deference to public emotions and the decision to respect them. That throughout the crisis Health Secretary Yeoh refused to wear a mask, saying that the virus was only transmissible through intimate contact, was a social gaffe of the first order. Note too that efface work – precisely because it is a performance – requires effort. Though this is not the emotional energy of attraction and enthusiasm, and the antithesis of collective celebration, mask-wearing demands activity: donning the mask, changing it every couple of hours, feeling it become fetid with spittle, speaking through it in frustratingly muffled tones, buying new masks, ripping them off in relief when back-stage. As a contribution to general sociological theory, I suggest that SARS showed that social ritual (as mask-wearing) can function even where *there is resistance to bodily contact*, even where *emotional energy is very low*, and even where a group *uses an emblem that appears to symbolize the opposite of integration*.

But if the mask functioned as the most visible signal of Hong Kong's collective fate, it was by no means the only means through which a common mood and focus of attention was generated. The mass media

assumed a vital role (30). To say it "constructed" SARS is obvious yet simplistic. The media transmitted and amplified many of the images of SARS (the masked city, heroes, war vocabulary); to that extent it was a "carrier group" (Alexander 2004, p. 11) of the public iconography. At the same time, it was itself constituted by public debate which it recursively channeled and for which it became a moral depository. The media was the people's bridge to each other at a time when *co-presence* was inevitable but *group assembly* was avoided – like the plague. The media was also of great significance during the SARS outbreak because Hong Kong people, unlike their Chinese mainland counterparts, could trust it and because, uncontrolled by the Communist Party, it was able to monitor the government, call it to account, suggest remedies and, in many instances of government hesitation, take the lead. In short, the media was not drafted in by the government, or controlled by it, for the purposes of public relations (31). And particularly in an age of multiple media channels afforded by the world-wide web, attempts to monopolize information are constantly tested. For instance, the Hong Kong government was initially reluctant to give details about where SARS was being discovered. Naming particular residential estates, it was said, might breech personal privacy, have legal implications and cause panic. A citizens' initiative simply sidelined such legal niceties: four computer buffs set up a website which gave the residential address of confirmed and suspected SARS cases. The website received five million hits between April 2 and 21 2003 and, compunction set aside, the government relented (32). On April 15 it established its own list of SARS-affected buildings. At the same time, newspapers released daily charts and figures itemizing where SARS had appeared or where its course was running. The upshot of this development was that Hong Kong residents could see clearly the *dispersion* of SARS throughout the entire territory – a factor that made Hong Kong as a whole, not just one part of it, feel collectively embattled.

Never mind that SARS was unevenly distributed, concentrating in Kwun Tong (515 cases) in Kowloon (33). The New Territories were also badly hit – Shatin had 272 cases, Taipo another 197. And while

(30) On the media's role as a channel, and not simply a shaper, of sensibility, see Chan (2003, p. 131), Loh *et al*. (2003, p. 204), Lee (2003, p. 104), Cheung and Sung (2003, p. 155).

(31) This is what Eric Klinenberg (2002, pp. 165-224) suggests in his analysis of the Chicago heat wave of 1995.

Duneier (2004) contests this point. For a response, see Klinenberg 2004.

(32) Loh *et al*., 2003, p. 205.

(33) Hong Kong is a geographical expression for three contiguous areas: Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories.
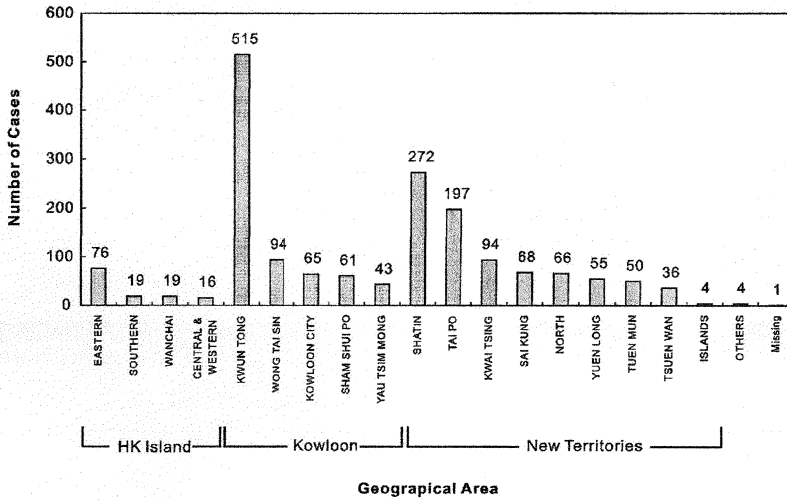
Number of SARS cases by geographical areas

Hong Kong island, the financial and government center of the territory, was left relatively unscathed, 76 people in the Eastern district still contracted SARS. Cumulatively, that lent credence to the widespread belief that SARS was either actually present in one's own neighborhood or within a short striking distance of it. Bottled up in their apartments, making every attempt at work and on public transport to seal themselves off from sources of contamination – their fellows – Hong Kongers in another age would have felt largely impotent. It was radio, television and to a lesser degree the internet that gave them hope, and that linked their destiny to that of their faceless, bemasked compatriots.

Radio played a special role. Its regent (since deposed) was Albert Cheng King-hon, the charismatic and pugnacious commentator whose morning call-in program on Commercial Radio's *Teacup in a Storm* (sic) attracted around 80 % of Hong Kong radio listeners between 7.30 and 10.00 am. Cheng established himself as the champion of health workers and the scourge of government procrastination (34). Programs

(34) I am drawing on my own observations and on Loh *et al.* (2003, pp. 204-5) who point out, with a roster of examples, that "the influence of media figures like Albert Cheng [and his side-kick Peter Lam] reinforced the impression that the government was under siege, as officials no longer seemed to be taking

like his prompted one commentator to say that, during the SARS episode, the "media became the true 'intermediary' that united different segments of the people and publicized their cause", helping them cope with the uncertainty of SARS "more effectively than any bureaucratic measure" could (35).

The term "intermediary" is striking for, in a famous passage, Durkheim (1995 [1912], p. 232) also notes the importance of what he calls "tangible intermediaries" in constituting collective representations. Durkheim observes that it is "by shouting the same cry, saying the same words and performing the same action in regard to the same object that [people] arrive at and experience agreement" (1995 [1912], p. 232). The same cry in the case of Hong Kong was "SARS" and lamentations devoted to the dead; the same action was donning the mask, retreating to the household and listening to or watching regular broadcasts of such amplificatory and "tangible intermediaries" as radio, television. The "heroic front line health workers themselves" were SARS' heroic emblem, rather like firefighters in the case of 9/11.

And when it was all over? "I feel like a survivor from a war zone" said Justin Wu Che-yuen, a Chinese University of Hong Kong clinical tutor and Hospital Authority medical officer. "I and my colleagues don't feel like celebrating – we knew Hong Kong would be taken off the WHO [travel advisory] list. But there is a sense of relief today... At the peak of the outbreak, I worried about the spread of the disease, from public lifts to people on the street. You couldn't trust anyone because some people didn't even know they had the virus (36)". Edmond Wong Chi-woon, 23 years old, scriptwriter of the film "City of SARS", concurred: "It's been intense. Such a massive, massive experience for this city. It hit everything, from Hong Kong's economy and its place in the world to the way we touch each other. It's not easy to squeeze all that into 90 minutes. I think everyone working on the film feels a tremendous sense of responsibility". "I'm not sure if this film even falls into the same genre as all the other virus films. If anything it is closer to a movie about war being fought on the home front. Yes, that's it – a war movie crossed with reality TV". Fellow director Peter Chan Ho-sun added, "Something fundamental has changed in Hong Kong since SARS. It doesn't feel so lost any more (37). We have something to cele-

the lead in providing guidance to the public". On a number of occasions the Hospital Authority and the government changed direction following radio exposure.

(35) Lee 2003, p. 104.

(36) Quoted in a report by Alex Lo, *South China Morning Post* June 24/03 p. C1.

(37) On SARS creating a "new sense of being *homed*" following an "alien SARS attack", see Lee 2003 p. 103.

brate'' (38). So it is that disease may provide an unexpected opportunity for social life to be renewed. Daniel Gordon's study of Marseilles, during the plague of 1720, shows how that epidemic, for all the suffering it caused, and in good measure because of it, became a source of civic pride, a badge of the city's independence from the royal court of France to which it was subordinated in 1660. A vibrant commercial port and vector of disease, Marseilles was cordoned off from the rest of France, but thereby regained some of its lost autonomy. If Marseilles became "the first instance in which disaster was used as an emblem of pride to counteract the homogenizing tendencies of modernity'' (Gordon 1999, p. 17), Hong Kong may be the latest.

Communities of fate, in the sense previously defined, are productive, not passive, bodies; they are socially consequential. What, then, did SARS produce? The SARS crisis occurred during a period in which the Hong Kong government sought to activate the slumbering Article 23 of the Basic Law, a provision that requires the local government to "enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets''. Article 23 also instructs the HKSAR to "prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies''. Even before the SARS outbreak, Article 23 provoked mounting anxiety among Hong Kong people, as data from the Hong Kong Transition Project shows clearly (39), and as political agitation also revealed: in December 2002, around 60,000 people took to the streets in protest. Published without a "white bill'' which would have specified in detail the precise legal formulae to be applied, government consultation on Article 23 appeared peremptory and, even worse for a constitutional document, ambiguous. Both the specific offences of subversion and secession were freshly created. The definition of what constituted "state secrets'' was broad and, bereft of a public interest defense, draconian; its implementation would have gagged, or at least intimidated, the academy and the media. And the crime of sedition – "inciting others... to commit the substantive offence of treason, secession or subversion... or [causing] violence or disorder which seriously endangers the stability of the state

(38) *South China Morning Post Magazine* June 8/03, 10-11. Article by Tom Hilditch. The other "virus films'' to which Wong is alluding include *Outbreak*, *28 Days Later*, *Twelve Monkeys*, and the 1958 horror classic *The Blob*.

(39) Hong Kong Transition Project, *Accountability and Article 23* (Hong Kong, Baptist University, 2003), pp. 8, 12, 36-37 and *passim*. The report is available at [http: //www.hkbu.edu.hk/ ~hktp/].

or the HKSAR' – included both speech acts *and publications*. No wonder many believed that Article 23 was a tyrant's charter.

Meanwhile, SARS confirmed many Hong Kongers' worst fears about Communist Party secrecy – the seriousness of the disease was originally covered-up – and the major difference between their own society and that of the mainland. If Article 23 had been in place and enforceable, many Hong Kong people asked themselves, would their own media have been able to monitor fearlessly the course of the disease, speak out on behalf of local residents, and hold the government to account for its tardiness and incompetence (40)? And it was SARS's compression with previous government debacles, and the threat posed by Article 23 that eventuated in the July 1 2003 demonstration on Hong Kong Island. The scale of the protest – a march to the government offices in Central of over 500,000 people – shocked the government and surprised the demonstrators themselves. For the contrast with the miserable spring days of March and April could hardly have been greater or more dramatic. Then, people fled public spaces – restaurants, cinemas, shopping malls, and public transport to the limited degree it could be avoided – and timidly confined themselves to their apartments. Now, in a major social effervescence, a large cross section of Hong Kong people – pressed tightly together, unmasked and charged up with a collective enthusiasm – demanded political change. Never before in Hong Kong's history, had so many gathered at one event to make political demands of their own local government. The result was simultaneous and deeply alarming for Beijing. Two ministers resigned. The Executive Council (the Hong Kong government's cabinet) hemorrhaged as the leader of the pro-business Liberal Party expressed his dismay at government intransigence, while the pro-Beijing mass party, which had supported Article 23, took a body blow to its prestige. Article 23 was shelved and, as of this writing, has not yet been resuscitated.

On the mainland, a demonstration like July 1, and the civic initiatives that presaged and accompanied it, would have been impossible, met by police truncheons or worse. In Hong Kong, by contrast, July 1 marked a

(40) "Freedom of the press ceased to be abstract when it was measured in terms of the deaths of 299 people, the infection of over one thousand and the virtual collapse of key sectors of the Hong Kong economy, including the tourism and hospitality industry", DeGolyer, op.cit., p. 125. A survey conducted by Hong Kong University's Public Opinion Program, between April 16 and April 23, revealed that only 9% of respondents were satisfied with the government's performance; this was a record low. See also Hong Kong Transition Project 2002.

period of hope that the government would be more receptive to local demands and also facilitate what the Basic Law permits: universal and direct elections, after 2007 and 2008 respectively, of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council (Legco). The November 2003 District Council election, with its resounding victory for the democratic movement, lent further credence to that aspiration (41). But just as supporters of the democratic parties were pressing the Hong Kong government to reveal its constitutional timetable, consultations were chilled by mainland intervention. A stream of Communist Party officials and lawyers, including some who had been among the drafters of the Basic Law, lined up to announce in December 2003 and January 2004 that electoral change was a "one nation", not a one system, affair. A delegation to Beijing in early February 2004, led by the Chief Secretary Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, was told in no uncertain terms that Hong Kong's process of political reform must abide by Basic Law "princi-ples": acceptance of the mainland's right to set the terms of constitu-tional change; "gradual and orderly progress" that fits the "actual" circumstances of Hong Kong; development that consolidates the executive-led system; and reaffirmation that "patriots" should govern Hong Kong (42). Xu Chongde, a former Basic Law drafter, also remind-ed Mr. Tsang's taskforce that the Basic Law's allusion to full democracy refers to changes "subsequent" to 2007, an indeterminate phrasing that by no means sanctions immediate or rapid transformation. The result in 2004 was to freeze the political process for at least a further few years albeit with some potential for increased representation (e.g. on the committee that chooses the Chief Executive). In the September 2004 Legco elections, the pro-democracy camp won 60 % of the total votes case (55.6 % of the electorate voted in a system of great internal complexity) but only 25 of Legco's 60 seats. It is possible that the "July effect" and with it the SARS effect, is now over.

Durkheim (1961 [1902-3], p. 89) observes that

> We constantly have the impression of being surrounded with a host of things in the course of happening whose nature escapes us. All sorts of forces move themselves about, encounter one another, collide near us almost brushing us in their passage; yet we go without seeing them until that time when some impressive

(41) With a 44.06% (1,065,363) turn-out of registered voters, the District Council election witnessed the Demo-cratic Party securing 95 seats (up from 86) and its main rival – the pro-government Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) – winning 62 seats (down from 83). The

Democratic Party fielded 120 candidates while the DAB fielded 204. Many other democrat sympathizers, independent of the two big parties, were elected.

(42) For further details, see the reports in the *South China Morning Post* of February 10 and 11, 2004.

culmination provides a glimpse of a hidden and mysterious event which has occurred under our noses, but of which we had no suspicion and which we begin to see only in terms of its results.

The "impressive culmination" of SARS, though not reducible to it alone, was the July 1 protest. Whether it was a "turning point" in Hong Kong's evolution, or part of a broader "trajectory" (Abbott 2001 [1997], p. 249) towards democracy – or neither – is not something we can yet know. Nonetheless, it was the kind of socially consequential action that communities of fate produce (43).

Discussion: "Community of Fate" – Objections and Applications

As a social scientific concept, "community of fate" is open to at least three rather different sorts of complaint. First it may be objected that it is inherently sentimental and unrealistic. Writing before the Nazi deluge, Helmuth Plessner (1999 [1924], p. 65) warned prophetically that the "idol of this age is community", a notion that, in the face of life's hardness, "has compressed all sweetness into mawkishness, tenderness into weakness, and flexibility into the loss of dignity". Community, he protested, is a saccharin concept ready made for all kinds of tendentious purpose (44). Yet hackneyed or dubious usage does not of itself disbar a term from sociological employment; it if did, we would have to say adieu to class, gender, status and citizenship. Careful definition is all we require and social scientists have produced a range of sophisticated attempts to offer precisely that (notably Keller 2004; Delanty 2003; Cohen 1985).

Besides, this anticipated objection rests on a misunderstanding. In my sense, the solidarity instantiated by a community of fate is based not on altruism but on a focused sense of inter-connectedness and

(43) On other political and legal responses to disaster, see for instance, Fidler (2004), Olson (2000), Shefner (1999). For a theoretical account of Taiwan as a "community of fate," see Chang (1999, pp. 73-116). For Chang, a community of fate depends on a common legal framework that "enables the construction of common experience and the attainment of common good".

(44) Or as Raymond Williams (1976, p. 66) observed: "Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavorably…". Selznick (1992), while agreeing with the general thrust of William's observation, makes the converse point that "community" is also often disparaged as small-minded and claustrophobic.

membership, not on love, but on danger, not on sympathy, but on fear. It is not to be confused with the *communitas* that, according to Victor Turner, accompanies the ritual process: a modality of social relationship that blends homogeneity, equality, comradeship (45). What homogeneity there is concerns the common danger and uncertainty that all face. This may lead to the sacrificial comradeship of Weber's "community of death" in which the self and the group are a mirror of each other (Weber 1948 [1915], p. 335). But it is also plainly open to misanthropic and hostile feelings to which, in the case of SARS, even the health workers were not immune. Medics were heroic only at a distance. Close-up, they and their families were feared as likely bearers of the mysterious killer virus. Those who had any close encounter with SARS, be it former patients, relatives of patients and even some of the medical staff treating them were pariahs within a pariah community. Consider the sobering *cri de coeur* of Leung Siu-hong a male nurse who caught SARS while providing SARS patients with intubations in the intensive care unit of the Princess Margaret Hospital:

> The worst thing about contracting SARS [for me] was not all the suffering but the fact that my family experienced a lot of discrimination when I was sick. When my sister told her boss that I had contracted SARS her colleagues started avoiding her and saying many mean things to her. But my family was too scared to tell me. I can't believe that after risking my life to help others, my family ended up being discriminated against. Every time I hear people talking about how they support health workers I feel sick to my stomach. They are all worthless lies. In reality, they treat us like lepers or monsters…You don't need to express your support and gratitude. We are just doing our job. We are not working for applause or praise. All we want is to be treated like normal people. I don't want to see protests from residents who don't want our dorms to be near their homes. It really attacks our morale. Many colleagues go to work every day and undergo self-exile without a deadline. It's worse than being infected (46).

Similar expressions of disdain and anger were ventilated by many of those who inhabited SARS affected estates. A survey of Amoy Gardens residents, conducted in August 2003 by the Mood Disorders Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and which focused on the impact of SARS during the month of April, found widespread ostracism. More than 40 % of the 903 residents interviewed reported that friends had rejected dinner invitations from them; roughly the same percentage felt compelled to conceal their place of abode when eating out or visiting a doctor; 30 % were denied home maintenance or delivery services; and

(45) I am greatly simplifying Turner's discussion. Even so, the "community" of which I write has substantially little in common with his three models of *com-munitas*: existential, normative, and ideological (Turner 1977 [1969]).

(46) "Behind the Mask," *South China Morning Post*, May 2, 03, C4.

20 % told of being denied entry to hotels or enduring discriminatory treatment in medical clinics (47).

A second objection is that the notion of a community of fate is compromised by its very generality. It is simply unrealistic. No situation embraces everyone in the same way or the same degree. Look for exceptions, and you will find them, but this is true of all the concepts of sociology. There are always people who are not afraid, who do not wear masks, or who wear them ironically in customized colors. Some people are better resourced and have more opportunities for flight than others; closure has its limits. Hence, in Hong Kong, many expatriate families fled for home, returning when the worst appeared to be over. But the chasing of anomalies is *sociologically* uninteresting unless it too forms some kind of pattern; "contingency" is the word we give to situations still unexplained. I began by saying that a community of fate is something local and situational, based in a particular place and time. It is grounded in a temporal and spatial "we" and the pre-political loyalties that sustain it. Its existence depends on micro processes that are both shaped from the outside (the collision with danger, closure) and unfurl from within (notably, social ritual). On this account, a community of fate, like pearls on a string, is composed of all those people, and just those people, who are affected and linked by all seven features that I mentioned earlier. Just as evidently, communities of fate build on extant social materials; they do not spring out of nowhere. But nor do they simply distil, and render visible, a set of pre-existent social materials. On the contrary, communities of fate reconfigure social life itself, reshuffle and reprioritize its elements, and bring into being something new and unexpected.

A third objection to the notion of community of fate is epistemological. It will occur to all social scientists of an individualistic and nominalist persuasion who find Durkheimian ontology "mystical" and who deplore "collective concepts". Can the concept of community of fate convince such a person? Probably not. Transform it, then, into an ideal-type. From that vantage point, particular crisis communities can be calibrated against the seven analytical ingredients mentioned previously. One seeks deviations from the "model" so as to highlight cases of historical specificity. Consider two situations: the Forest Jews of Belarus and the Warsaw Ghetto.

The so-called Forest Jews were a community of Jews, and a few Gentiles, that survived Nazi occupation by hiding in the *puscha* (dense

(47) "Amoy Gardens' post-traumatic SARS disorder", by Klaudia Lee, *South China Morning Post*, December 19, 03, A4.

foliage) surrounding the Belarus towns of Novogrudek and Lida. By July 1944, when the Red Army evicted German forces from the region, it comprised around 1,200 persons. This "Jerusalem", as its denizens called it, contained most of the ingredients of a community of fate that I mentioned above. Its members were a stigmatized group. They joined the wooded Jerusalem because of their belief that conditions in their town were so hazardous as to demand their attention and action. Many endured forest life for two and a half years. They mobilized resources by living off the land, erecting shelter and expropriating food and goods from nearby farms. And their localization (albeit one of mobility among the forests) eventuated in a small town with its own division of labor. It contained:

> Living quarters; workshops for tailors, shoemakers, seamstresses and carpenters; a large herd of cows and horses; a school for sixty children; a main street and a central square; a musical and dramatic theater; and a tannery that doubled as a synagogue. (Duffy 2003, p. xi)

Of special significance, and without which the community would never have existed or survived, was the indefatigable leadership of three brothers: Tuvia, Zus and Asael Bielski. Their knowledge of the terrain, vision, daring, willingness to prosecute a guerrilla war against the invaders, rather than succumb to apathy, were the *sine qua non* of the Forest Jews. The Bielski brothers also led with an iron fist and tolerated little dissension; to that extent, however, the band approximates a regimented group. Social ritual revolved around daily watches for the enemy and deference paid to the rules of camp life. And what did the Forest Jews accomplish? They retained their freedom at a time, and under conditions, calculated to destroy it.

A far more interesting case, precisely because it fits fewer ideal-typical dimensions of community of fate (thereby prompting us to probe deeper) is that of the Warsaw Ghetto. "Ale glach! Ale glach!" (48). So shouted the Ghetto's equivalent of the medieval Fool. But was this

(48) Yiddish for "All alike! All alike!'; German: "Alle gleich! Alle gleich!'' See Reich-Ranicki (2002 [1999], p. 144) on which the following account relies, together with Mazor (1993 [1955]). Both authors were confined in the Ghetto and have produced luminous, yet hard-headed, accounts of it. I note in passing that Mazor's work brims with references to "fate'' as on pp. 14-15, 89, 94, 100, 132, 136, 140, 151. On pp. 184-185 he remarks that "All the occupants of the Warsaw ghetto were united by a common fate. They lived on a ship that was about to sink... [C]orruption and demoralization never penetrated deeply into the general population. Most people showed tremendous tenacity and great resolve... Also, they created, amazing, highly specific institutions of public relief... It was the popular forces in the ghetto that bred and nurtured the heroic resistance against the Germans in the unforgettable days of April and May 1943''.

true? On the face of it, the Warsaw Ghetto contained many of the properties required of a community of fate. Established in October 1940 and demolished in April/May 1943, the Ghetto was a cramped space which at its peak contained possibly 400,000 inhabitants. It was materially bound by a wall and other constrictions. It consisted of a stigmatized group. It was active, with many emergent associations springing up to face calamity. The Ghetto hosted not only orchestras, but also created vibrant and highly active social institutions (notably, mutual aid and tenement committees) – revealingly describe by Mazor (1993 [1955], pp. 76, 101) as "new forces", the "spontaneous manifestation" of "humanism and solidarity". Political groups such as left-wing Zionists continued to exist. And, of course, the Ghetto produced the remarkable and bloody uprising against the Nazis.

Closure was another obvious ingredient. Mazor (1993 [1955], pp. 41, 42) characterized the Ghetto as a "hermetically-sealed universe" or a "sealed coffin'; in fact, it allowed some degree of porousness between the Ghetto's membrane and its hinterland. People left the Ghetto to work and some never returned; food, clothes and weapons were smuggled in. Yet within the penumbra of the *Todeskästchen* ("death chest") as the Nazis called it, the Ghetto was a deeply stratified place. It contained stark contrasts between the starving and those still able, as a result of smuggling or corruption, to eat delicacies. It contained Jews of many areas, occupations and languages whose plight was by no means uniform. Take occupation: doctors, dentists, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, tailors and shoemakers were in far greater demand, and thus better off, than teachers and lawyers. But most conspicuous of all was the fact that much of the political authority and coercion that existed in the Ghetto was devolved by the Nazis on to Jews themselves. The Jewish Councils were widely distrusted; the Jewish "police" or militia universally hated outside their own small circles. By using Jewish auxiliaries, the Nazis deliberately created the conditions of division. This also complicated and impaired danger-recognition. To be sure, everyone knew that they faced a terrible threat. Reich-Ranicki (2002, p. 141) observes that "weighing" on everyone, "whether young or old, whether clever or stupid was a dark and terrible shadow from which there was no escape – the shadow of the fear of death". Mazor concurs: the City of Death was rank with fear. Yet the Nazis' practice of granting exceptions to camp deportation for a few "privileged" groups fractured solidarity. Temporarily extended to employees of the Jewish Council, policemen, hospital staffs and others of immediate utility, this "torture by hope", this oscillation between "provisional life" and "instant death", left its

agents desperate but socially splintered (49). Social differentiation is certainly compatible with a community of fate. It was not differentiation but divisiveness that reduced the scope of solidarity in the Ghetto, a fissiparousness that the Nazis deliberately engineered. And the situation of discord and separation was aggravated by an epidemic of typhus that induced further social repulsion and disarray.

This is an incomplete picture of a complex situation. Much more needs to be learned about the codes of representation, the social language, employed by the Ghetto's residents. A detailed sociological analysis would begin by noting, for instance, that "Warsaw Ghetto" was itself a Jewish self-description, alluding to the historical experiences of the Jews over many centuries. The Nazis, in contrast, avoided this term and referred instead to the walled environment as the "Jewish Quarter". A closer analysis than I have provided would, I am confident, also show the widespread use of neologisms, a local argot and ritual that was specific to the conditions encountered by the entrapped Jews. It might be objected that the reason why the Warsaw Ghetto was only dubiously a community of fate, while the Forest Jews were, ideal typically, very close to being one is simply a matter of scale. There is some truth in this. The greater the numbers and internal complexity of a group, the more difficult it is for a community of fate to form. Yet while small size may be a propitious condition for a community of fate, it is neither a necessary nor, of course, a sufficient one. Much of Hong Kong, I have already argued, approximated a community of fate during the SARS outbreak of 2003. Conversely, the smallest units of embattled people may fail to create one. We have only to read Victor Klemperer's account of the so-called Jews' Houses in Dresden to get a sense of this. True, Klemperer was the kind of person to especially loathe the "promiscuity" of the Houses, that is, their chronic lack of privacy and indiscretion. But his portrait suggests a more general malaise: "Many of the people with whom we would gladly live in peace, are at daggers drawn, slander one another. Cohn curses the Stühlers – 'they're just Bavarians, that's all!', Konrad and Berger rave at one another" (Klemperer 1999 pp. 341-342).

(49) On "torture by hope" and privileged categories, see Mazor (1993 [1955], p. 144). On "provisional life" and "instant death" and the Nazi definition of "useful Jews", see Reich-Ranicki (2002 [1999], pp. 178-9).

Conclusion

If "community of fate" fails to shed light on situations of social duress, on the dynamics of groups facing a radical challenge to their existence, it is simply redundant. If, however, the concept enables us to understand at least some aspects of crisis conditions, it will have done a little work for students of emergency. Both realist and nominalist approaches to the subject are possible and, under different logical protocols, valuable. That pragmatic compatibility is fortunate. For war, terror, epidemic and other "natural" disasters continue to haunt our times. As sociologists, we need urgently to develop concepts that explain the range, type, and consequences of emergency responses: we are, alas, bound to see more of them soon. Professionally, we need to build bridges between mainstream sociology and the work being done by disaster specialists in such outlets as the *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* (50).

My focus on Hong Kong during the SARS outbreak is only a starting point. How did people respond to the London plague of 1665 and its counterpart in Marseilles during 1720? What were the social dynamics of Parisians during the Commune of 1871? Does disease produce a different kind of collective response than military invasion, as for instance in Nanking, the Chinese city facing the Japanese Imperial Army in 1937, or Leningrad under siege from the Wehrmacht in 1941? At what point, and under what conditions, does a group disintegrate or reassert itself with new-found energy? A particular area that requires further elaboration is the relationship between community of fate and the character of the host society. For instance, how does the nature of a group's axis of convergence affect a community of fate? Does ethnicity have different consequences from those of language or confession? These and other unanswered questions indicate that community of fate is a concept very much in the making. It is still rough and largely untested. I ask others to help make it more serviceable or replace it with something better.

(50) See also the papers edited by Quarantelli (a pioneer in disaster research) 1998.

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