

# Excursions

Volume 10, Issue 1 (2020) | Chaos



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*Essays: Research in Times of Chaos*

**Joseph Gough**  
Chaos for Enquiries

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# Chaos for Enquiries

**Joseph Gough**  
*University of Sussex*

The premise of this call for essays is that Covid-19 has thrown researchers and research into a chaotic new world; submissions are encouraged to consider the effect that the chaos has had on our research, and how we, as researchers, have navigated that chaos. The idea that the pandemic has thrown us into chaos presupposes that previously we were living in a more orderly world and that the pandemic has to a significant extent unmade that order, replacing it with disorder and confusion. In some sense, this is clearly correct. Across the world, many people and institutions have had to break with their old routines; the order of routine, of carrying on in the same way, has been broken, and in that way, the world has become more chaotic, more disordered and confused.

However, this is far from the whole picture. To a significant extent, the order of the world before the pandemic remains thoroughly intact. Structures of privilege and oppression, which ordered the world before the pandemic, continue to order the world during the pandemic. Public Health England's inquiry, *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19*, finds that inequalities in mortality rates "largely replicate existing inequalities" – the chance of dying, given a diagnosis of Covid-19, is "higher in males than females; higher in those living in the more deprived areas than those living in the least deprived; and higher in those in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups than in White ethnic groups". The only significant break

from existing inequalities is that BAME people are *more* likely to die given a Covid-19 diagnosis than previous inequalities would predict; for example, deaths among black men were 3.9 times what was expected between 20 March and 7 May. In this sense, the “chaos” of the new world is not chaos at all – it is a reflection and exacerbation of the existing structures of our society, structures of inequality and injustice. Those structures will likely survive the pandemic; so too should our outrage, and the sense of moral obligation to bring that into our research.