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A CHANGING SCENE

COVID-19 pandemic impacts on lives of travel economy stakeholders in Goa

Petra Nilsson

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in North Goa, India. It concerns impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel economy stakeholders, in relation to their perception of their living situations, both present and future. *Travel economy* has tentatively been used as a separate category from the dominating tourism industry, to describe the experiences of people doing business within the alternative and international travel scenes of Goa. During fieldwork, qualitative methods of participant observation and Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP) were applied. The aim has been to gain a holistic and emic perspective of pandemic impacts.

I explore relationships between global travel flows, subcultures, neoliberalism and crisis, through four temporalities: *Pre-pandemic*, *pandemic*, (the ethnographic) *present* and *future*. I discuss themes that have been important to participants during the fieldwork, using anthropological literature and theory. Theories concerning crisis, economics, mobility, subcultures, space and temporality have been of relevance. Key analytical terms include: *Disaster capitalism*, *neoliberalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, *neotribalism*, *binary opposition, symbolic space* and *nostalgia*.

The anthropological fieldwork and analysis has highlighted the economic, social and personal hardships endured by people in the travel economy of Goa since the pandemic. It shows that the hardships have, by and large, been the results of the way pandemic restrictions were enforced and lifted, as the authorities have shown little awareness of cultural values and practices of the travel economy. I therefore argue that it is of great importance to keep local cultural variations in mind when designing future crisis and disaster management efforts, to minimise people's losses and suffering.

Keywords:

Anthropology, COVID-19, Goa, crisis management, travel economies, hippie culture

Nyckelord:

Antropologi, COVID-19, Goa, krishantering, rese-ekonomier, hippiekultur

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the people who I met and spent time with in Goa. Thank you for sharing your stories and experiences with me. I hope that your future will be a lot brighter than the dark years just past.

सब कुछ मिलेगा

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1. Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, in early 2020, I was on a journey through India for the fourth time. Peoples' perception of the pandemic changed rapidly. In a matter of hours the reactions to news of pandemic events went from merry scepticism to shock and panic. I was one among countless foreigners who had to scramble to get a flight out of the country, to not risk getting 'stuck' in India. I was lucky to make it to Sweden two days prior to the closing of Europe's borders, and four days before India went into its first lockdown. Contacts living in Goa were not as lucky. When the first pandemic lockdown started in India I got the news of people being without money, food and support.

The state of Goa is one of India's major travel hotspots. Goa attracts people from all over India and the world for travel, leisure, parties or even a whole new life (D'Andrea, 2007:181). When the pandemic hit, the neoliberal decentralised market in Goa, which promised great rewards pre-pandemic, left many travel economy stakeholders without income (Goa Tourism, n.d.; Hindustan Times, 2021). The negative economic impacts of the pandemic are often the main focus of discourses regarding COVID-19 impacts (ANI, 2021). As a student in anthropology I believe that a more holistic perspective is necessary, to better understand the full spectrum of impacts that the pandemic may have had. This inspired a two month ethnographic field study among travel economy stakeholders in North Goa, from January to March 2022. In this essay I am going to discuss the results of the field study using anthropological literature and theories. I will discuss how people live and cope since the pandemic, within current neoliberal economic structures, and how it has altered their perspective on their living situations, both present and future.

1.1 Background

Let us begin by lingering on Goa as the field of choice. Goa is not only an Indian tourism hotspot, but also an international hub for various alternative subcultures. Goa is a former Portuguese colony, which has heavily influenced Goan architecture, religious landscape and cuisine, which are today some of the reasons why Goa is a very popular travel destination (D'Andrea, 2007:181; Harding, 2019). European *hippies* started coming to Goa in the 1960's and established the alternative hippie subculture in the area. The hippie culture has remained and morphed over time. In the 1980's electronic dance music entered the scene and in the 1990's *Goa trance* (psytrance) was created. The genre quickly spread across the world and

made Goa (Anjuna in particular) somewhat of a Mecca for psytrance aficionados. Many people come to Goa for the psytrance alone. Psytrance as a music genre is also a defining feature of a distinct psytrance subculture which in many cases is closely tied to the hippie movement, especially in Goa (D'Andrea, 2007). Goa is similarly a hub for people who are interested in other practices associated with hippie culture, such as live music, tantra, ecstatic dance, yoga, healing etcetera. These particular kinds of subcultures and traveller niches have made Goa a popular and unique travel destination (D'Andrea, 2007; Giorgio, 2019; Bizzell 2008).

1.2 Aim and scope

The purpose of the field study and this essay is to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted travel economy stakeholders in North Goa, from a holistic and emic perspective. The aim was to map out the impacts in such a way that it may expose strengths and weaknesses of the way the pandemic management efforts unfolded. The study reaches beyond a purely economic perspective by engaging with sociocultural dimensions of participants' lives. The local perspective has also been situated in the nexus of global economic and human flows, to explore the relationship between the local and global.

The study included people who considered Goa to be their home (regardless of ethnicity) and who operated in the travel economy, i.e. made a living through business based on alternative subcultures and global flows of people. The study concerned stakeholders operating in coastal areas of the Northern districts of Pernem and Bardez, and their respective social spheres. I hope that this essay may be of use to the participants in the study, as well as others concerned, in Goa or otherwise. I also hope that it may aid authorities in Goa in implementing crisis management strategies, which may enable people to live and thrive in the area for years to come.

1.2.1 Research questions

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected people's perception of their life in Goa, who depend on the travel economy for their livelihoods?

- How do participants relate to changes in the physical, economic and social landscape of Goa since the pandemic?

- How may the pandemic have shaped participants' outlook on the future, in relation to crisis and uncertainty?

1.3 Key concepts

In the following section I will briefly define a few concepts that have been used by participants during the fieldwork that are of key importance in this report:

Alternative	Synonymous with *subculture*. It signals a person, practice or aesthetic that purposefully deviates from the cultural norm.
Hippie	A person within the wider hippie community. A hippie commonly subscribes to liberal ideologies and rejects societal structures of violence and oppression.
Psytrance	An abbreviation of *psychedelic trance music*. It is an up-beat music genre within *electronic dance music* (EDM).
Scene	An assemblage of people, things or events that create a distinct whole, e.g. the travel scene, the maffia scene or the psytrance scene.
Subculture	A distinct group of people within a larger cultural setting with interests, practices or ideologies that deviate from the cultural norm.
Tourism industry	A consumption-based industry which caters to tourists, i.e. short-term travellers. Tourists are commonly associated with charter travels, packaged tours and fine dining.
Travel industry	An industry catering to travellers, i.e. people living nomadically long term who show interest in local cultures and experiences. In this dissertation I call the travel industry the *travel economy* (see 1.4.2).

1.4 Theoretical framework

This section will cover the theories and analytical concepts that have influenced the anthropological analysis of the empirical material from the field study.

1.4.1 Crisis

The topic of COVID-19 coping and recovery has been approached using literature concerning disasters and crises, for three main reasons: First, the body of research concerning the effects of the pandemic is still small. Second, the speed in which the pandemic swept over the world and the powerful crisis response that followed can be likened to that of disasters. Third, the way in which social and economic inequalities surfaced through the pandemic share great similarities with many disasters.

A returning argument within anthropology of disasters is that disasters are not coincidences, but rather results of social and economic structures in society (Browne, 2015; Faas & Barrios, 2015). Looking into theories of structure and agency is therefore of relevance when considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. One example of such theories is Paul Farmer's (2004) notion of *structural violence*, which refers to historical, economic and social processes that systematically undermine the wellbeing of certain people.

A common critique is also that crisis management often lacks insights into sociocultural dimensions of lives of disaster victims. Economic impacts of crises often receive the main focus. Recovery efforts tend to have a 'one size fits all' approach. This fieldwork focused, in anthropological fashion, on sociocultural dimensions of pandemic impacts. Local realities of how people and communities have experienced the crisis have taken centre stage (Browne, 2015; Faas & Barrios, 2015).

1.4.2 Economics

I have opted for an anthropological perspective on economics, which means that I highlight the *meaning* that economics holds for people and communities. Within economic anthropology economics is often seen as a form of social reproduction, which is semiotically embedded with values and which shapes the physical landscape (Hann, 2017). The travel industry, in conjunction with alternative subcultures, have formed a complex and reciprocative economic system in Goa, which I tentatively call the *travel economy* in this dissertation. Through the term I explore the binary opposition participants experience between travel and tourism industries, as well as the social and symbolic dimensions of the travel economy and

alternative scene in Goa.

Naomi Klein's (2008) notion of *catastrophe capitalism* has influenced the discussion of the changes in the economic landscape of North Goa since the pandemic. Klein uses the term to describe how large capitalist enterprises make use of- and fuel disasters and crises, to pave the way for lucrative investments. Catastrophe capitalism effectively describes processes that have been taking place in Goa during the pandemic.

The Goan economy is dominated by a private, decentralised market. Using anthropological literature that treats neoliberalism has therefore also been of relevance. I take inspiration from Mathieu Hilgers (2011) three ways of approaching the topic of neoliberalism anthropologically: (1) Neoliberalism may be seen as a culture in itself; presumptions of ownership and autonomy creates a feedback loop between ideology and the material world, often expressed as capitalist economic practices. (2) Neoliberalism may be seen as a system which creates specific forms of hierarchies, which govern people's actions. (3) Neoliberalism can thus be seen as a self-governing structure. Within neoliberal and capitalist economic structures the state often lacks in possibilities in helping people in need, due to low state involvement and low taxes. When disaster strikes people therefore lack government support (Hilgers, 2011).

The notion of *freedom* is also a common aspiration within neoliberal thought, as the name suggests; liberalism coming from the Latin *liber* meaning 'free' (Gagnier, 2009). While the definition of freedom is debated (Gagnier, 2009; Hilgers, 2011) the strive for freedom is still an everyday reality for participants. I will therefore discuss the meaning and importance of freedom to participants, in relation to their present and future.

1.4.3 Mobility

The fieldwork was initially inspired by tourism studies, as it concerned the entanglement of locals on international and commercial flows of people. Anthropology of tourism, however, often takes on a critical view of how tourism affects local communities. As such it often makes a clear divide between the tourist and the local (Xiao, Jafari, Cloke & Tribe, 2013). In the travel economy of Goa, I found that the communities and subcultures were formed in cooperation between locals and travellers, blurring the definition of what is local and creating a global community which is not bound by place. Widening the lens into mobility studies has therefore been more useful in understanding this entanglement (see 1.5.2). I have been influenced by the current of thought within anthropology and sociology known as the *mobility turn*. This means that one does not look at mobility as something deviating from a static norm,

but rather sees the world as in a constant flux (Shelley & Urry, 2006; Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013).

The concept of *regimes of mobility* has been used to reflect upon the power dynamics inherent in different forms of mobility. Regimes of mobility is an umbrella term for discussing the relationship between immobility and mobility, on various scales, and how people conceptualise and relate to their *mobility potential*. There is a great difference, for example, between the mobility potential of a legal leisure traveller and a paperless refugee. The two belong to different regimes of mobility, with different levels of agency (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

Cosmopolitanism has also been useful when discussing the values and social life within the Goa travel economy. The term refers to a transnational ideology and lifestyle, where one sees all of humanity as one community. Pre-pandemic peoples' relationships would – in a cosmopolitan spirit – defy nationalities and borders. Relationships were based upon mutual interests and aspirations, rather than ethnicities. I have used the concept of cosmopolitanism to discuss the cultural aspects of mobility, in relation to pandemic impacts. Cosmopolitanism is also a returning concept within ethnographic works concerning psytrance and hippie culture (D'Andrea, 2007; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; St John, 2010).

1.4.4 Subcultures

The meaning and use of the term *culture* has long been debated within the anthropological discipline (Abu-Lughod, 1991). The notion of *subculture* has however been an important theme for participants throughout fieldwork. The study of subcultures has been a defined field of research since the mid 1900's, as sociologists started exploring the workings of deviant youth cultures (Gelder, 2007; Nwalozie, 2015). *Subculture* generally refers to a group of people who adhere to a cultural narrative which is different from the cultural norm (Gelder, 2007). I have used the terms *counterculture* as well, to discuss how travel economy stakeholders have distanced themselves from the presently dominating tourism industry (Gristina, 2019; St. John, 2010). The structuralist notion of *binary opposition* has been used to explore this relationship. Binary opposition refers to the process of defining something or someone through their opposition to something else, a polar opposite (Gelder, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998).

It is difficult to classify people into specific subcultures in Goa, however, as the state hosts a heterogenous and global community, with a social flow between and within groups. Participants commonly talked about 'scenes' when referencing various social settings. I have

chosen to use the umbrella term *alternative* to reference subculture communities and scenes in Goa, as it has been used by participants to reference themselves and others who also deviate from the cultural norm (D'Andrea, 2007; St. John, 2010).

The hippie and psytrance subcultures, which are closely tied to the travel economy of Goa, have received little coverage within the social sciences. The concept of *neotribalism*, deployed by Michel Maffesoli (1996) has been used among scholars to describe the workings of the subcultures (Bizzell, 2008; St John, 2010). The term has similarly been useful in this ethnography. Neotribalism refers to a postmodern movement where socialites are not defined by place, but rather anchored in common traits and interests. Social networks, such as the psytrance culture, may thus defy geographical borders (Gristina, 2019; St. John, 2010).

I use Setha Low's (1996) term *symbolic space* and Ken Gelders (2007) term *subculture geographies*, to explore the meaning and symbolism embedded in place. They refer to processes of cultural narration of places, as sites of social reproduction and identity formation (Gelder, 2007: 2; Low, 1996). I discuss whether participants feel at home and welcome in places in Goa and how that has changed since the pandemic. I also explore how places are used and how that has changed since the pandemic.

1.4.5 Temporality

I take inspiration from Kathleen Stewart's (1988) conceptualisation of *nostalgia*, as a narrative that shapes and gives meaning to people's present and future. Stewart argues that nostalgia is a key part of how humans orient themselves in the present. The nostalgic narrative changes depending on where we currently stand. Stewart argues that nostalgic aesthetics hold great importance in our perception of our surroundings (1988).

One may argue that our present surroundings are embedded with semantics of *future* possibilities as well, which guide our movement and thought. How people conceptualise the future in relation to crisis and uncertainty has been of great importance. For this analysis I have been greatly aided by *Anthropology of the Future* (Bryant & Knight, 2019). Themes such as *expectation*, *speculation* and *hope* are used to discuss what meaning the conceptualisation of the future means to our present and daily life.

1.5 Material and methodology

The primary material which forms the basis of this report comes from a two-month fieldwork in North Goa, India, from January to March 2022. The methods applied have been *participant observation* and *rapid ethnographic assessment procedures* (REAP).

1.5.1 Participants

The study consisted of 29 key participants, as well as a large number of participants who I interacted with more briefly during participant observation. 21 of the key participants were men and 8 were women. Their ages range from early-twenties to late-forties. The study also included a survey with 6 participants, all of whom were men in the same age range. English has been used as a bridge language.

Prior to fieldwork, the plan was to identify and approach most of the participants for the study through scouting the markets and touristy areas and spontaneously talking to people there. Once in the field this method proved difficult as men (who make up the majority of business stakeholders) seemed to interpret my interest in their lives as an invitation to flirt. The attention gave rise to many uncomfortable moments and insecurity. I decided to use the snowball effect to find participants instead. This method proved effective in finding the kind of people who were within the scope of the study, as I networked with people in the travel economy and alternative community. I kept spending some time in markets and restaurants as a quantitative method; keeping discussions brief or simply doing observation from afar.

1.5.2 Participant observation

The method of *participant observation* is seen by many as the backbone of anthropological research. It involves utilising the embodied experience of the researcher as a research tool. By engaging in activities the researcher gains insights into the emic perspective of the participants. She is able to experience their sensory reality and is better able to understand non verbal communication and cultural nuances. (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011, ch 1). I have therefore not shied away from highlighting my own presence in the ethnographic discussion, as my presence is my primary data collection tool.

Participant observation entailed spending time in various social settings and taking part in social activities. People were generally happy to invite me into their everyday lives, curious about my study and keen in discussing my topics, as it had affected all of them in one

way or another. I studied the way that people interacted, what people talked about and how they talked about it. Conversations would often naturally end up on topics of interest. I would sometimes seize the opportunity and ask questions, to probe further into the topic. I always had a notebook or phone close at hand, to write down field notes and particularly interesting strings of dialogue and quotes.

The time management varied each day, according to the field conditions. Participant observation would often take place in the afternoons and evenings. Each day I wrote a detailed field diary of the day's events and the conversations that had been taking place. This was a platform where rich descriptions were interspersed with reflexive analysis (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011; Geertz, 1974).

1.5.3 Rapid ethnographic assessment procedures

Rapid ethnographic assessment procedures (REAP) is a collection of methods commonly associated with applied anthropology. During the fieldwork I have been inspired by REAP, as defined by David Griffith (2009), as complementary data collection to participant observation:

Background Literature & Archival Research	Getting a holistic perspective through studying literature. I studied local newspapers and social media as secondary material.
Cultural Mapping	Mapping out cartographically how places are used and what cultural significance they have.
Photography	Photographing things participants consider important. Photography also became a form of social bonding opportunity, as participants sometimes wanted to take selfies. Some also seemed happy that I photographed an event, as it meant that I considered the event important enough to document.
Transect Walks	Interviews conducted while in movement, where the participant talks about the space and associations they have to the surroundings. This was done informally, without recording.
Open-ended Interviews	Conversations held with participants during participant observation have been used as informal interviews. I had

	pre-prepared questions, which I sometimes used during conversations.
Survey and *Cultural Consensus Analysis*	Using surveys to validate qualitative data in a quantitative manner. A survey was posted in four large local groups on social media. I only received six answers, which generated some interesting critical reflection but considering the small number of replies it will not hold significant analytical importance in the discussion.

1.5.4 Positionality

As mentioned, being a woman was more trouble than anticipated during fieldwork. Being a white Swedish woman with the possibility to travel to India also gave me a position where some people seemed to assume that I had a lot of disposable income. While speaking to people with low income I was frequently urged to buy their goods or donate money or food. I often ended up buying something, either food or something they sold, on an economically viable level. It was a way for me to express gratitude for their participation and a small act which would benefit participants.

I also explored my positionality as a traveller. Many expressed happiness and a sense of relief that I (as a Swede) had managed to travel to Goa, as it signalled that more people may return shortly. Having lived in Goa previously, it was similarly interesting to explore my positionality as a part of the pre-pandemic community. Being personally involved and forming friendships with participants I believe was a prerequisite for in-depth fieldwork and understanding. This was an act of balance, however. It required an ongoing awareness of my social role. I positioned my experience in relation to the experiences of the participants, while trying to remain vigilant that my experience was not equal to that of my participants. Several participants told me that my presence as a researcher stimulated beneficial reflection on their living situation.

1.6 Ethical considerations

I have had to take extra precautions during fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been vaccinated against the virus and followed local pandemic restrictions. During the study I have followed the ethical framework outlined by Vetenskapsrådet (2017). In this section I will

describe in more detail what measures I have taken to ensure that the study has been ethically just.

Participants were informed about the study and its purpose. They were informed on how the information they provided would be used and that they could choose to opt out of participating at any point. During fieldwork I have maintained contact with many participants and collected contact information of those who were interested in reading the study post- or pre-publishing. The aim was to make the study into a collaborative effort with participants (Fluehr-Lobban, 2008; Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). I have also paid attention to power dynamics produced during fieldwork and the issue of representation. I have strived to be reflexively aware of my positionality (see 1.5.4) and include participants' feedback into the writing process. I believe that effective communication has enabled a form of representation that participants feel comfortable with (Fleuhr-Lobban, 2008).

Finally, as part of my ethical considerations, I have pseudonymized participants to ensure that information published in the thesis cannot be used to track down specific individuals. All empirical data from the field study (outside of the thesis itself) has been password protected. Potentially sensitive information has not been saved. The information provided to me will not be forwarded to others without permission (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). I have chosen to include place-names in the dissertation, as places have held great significance to people. Omitting place names would mean omitting a key part of the cultural landscape of Goa. I have, however, refrained from associating specific individuals and business descriptions with said places.

2. Ethnographic discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the empirical data from the field study in North Goa and answer the research questions, using anthropological theory. I have divided the section into chronological order, according to temporal themes used by participants: *pre-pandemic*, *pandemic*, (the ethnographic) *present* and *future*. Naturally, each temporal theme stems from the participants' position in the present; it is their *perception* of these temporalities and how their perception affects their actions that I aim to convey. Each temporal theme has then been further divided into sections, based on themes that have been important to participants during fieldwork.

2.1 Pre-pandemic – "sab kuch milega"

Evoking the past as a means of talking about the present and future has been a common theme among participants. 'Life before' – or 'old Goa', as many called it – was commonly talked about in romanticised, nostalgic terms. There seemed to be a clear line drawn between life pre-pandemic and life now, with the pandemic being seen as a paradigm shift of great importance. I would therefore like to linger on my own and participants' experiences of 'old Goa', before diving into life as it looks presently, since the pandemic.

2.1.1 Community

The small dirt road outside the hostel had been hot and busy. Noises, smells and shop keepers had been demanding my attention. Coming into the leafy shadiness was a welcome relief. A smell of incense filled the hostel courtyard and palm trees swayed gently in the breeze high above. A man from the group of people at the far end of the courtyard greeted me warmly upon entering. I was soon embraced with a hug and a "welcome home" by the whole group of people, who had been relaxing under the canopy. I was invited into the group like a member of a family. We lived like a large family together as well and spent most of our days as a group, both inside and outside the hostel. I had become a part of the melting pot of people and opportunities called *Goa*.

This was my first experience with the Goa alternative community in 2017. I open up the ethnographic discussion with this experience, as it has come to be an important part of how the fieldwork unfolded and what I ended up finding. Having experienced and been a part of the Goa community pre-pandemic gave me a heuristic ball plank in analysing the impacts

of the pandemic and a common ground in my relationships with the people that I met. It also gave me a position where I seemed to evoke the past for participants. I was a person that 'had returned'. The night I arrived, my friend Amit (who I knew since 2017) exclaimed:

> Petra, you are the *first* person from the [hostel] tribe to return since the pandemic. Man, we are *so* happy to have you here!

Though Amit's hostel was not the same as the one I had lived in previously, the many backpacker hostels around North Goa had a flow between them. The many hostels and businesses thus made up a great community. People would get together daily to help one another, go to parties, hang out or go on trips. I was therefore still part of the *tribe*, even though I never lived in Amit's hostel in particular. Alternative people, such as the hippie and psytrance communities, commonly use the term *tribe* to describe networks of people within the communities. This is common in Goa as well as within hippie and psytrance communities that I have engaged with around the world (St. John 2010; D'Andrea, 2007). I find the term *neotribalism* effective to describe the workings of the alternative community in Goa. My experience with friend groups in Goa is that they are like a chosen family. Neotribalism captures a common romanticism of tribal communities within the alternative scene, as well. The notion of tribalism carries the sense of community and cooperation that many people value. A stranger within the alternative scene is generally considered a friend you don't know yet (Bizzell, 2008: D'Andrea, 2007; Maffesoli 1996; St. John, 2010).

The popular psytrance DJ, Sadhu and hippie icon Goa Gil called the psytrance community "a global tribe that transcends nationalities [and] national borders." (McAteer interview, 2001 in Bizzell, 2008: 281). Indeed, *cosmopolitanism* has been an inherent part of the Goa psytrance and wider alternative scenes since its infancy, considering its international roots. My own first journey to Goa was inspired by the psytrance community on the other side of the world (Australia). The social network associated with hippie and psytrance cultures stretches internationally. It is based on common interests, aesthetics and ideologies, rather than localities. That Goa Gil uses the expression 'transcend nationalities' to describe cosmopolitanism captures a common ideology as well; that human made structures such as borders are arbitrary make-belief and silly to comply with. The community generally strives for freedom of movement, practice and thought (St John 2010; D'Andrea, 2007); something which many experienced in Goa pre-pandemic.

2.1.2 Freedom & abundance

The expression ‘sab kuch milega’ used to be important in Goa before the pandemic. It is a Hindi phrase directly translated as ‘will get everything’, but used more as ‘anything is possible’. It means that you have the freedom and power to do anything, if you give it a try. Pre-pandemic, the expression was used on a daily basis. Whenever anyone asked if they should or could do something the answer would always be ‘sab kuch milega’. For my social circle the phrase held the promise of infinite possibilities, a notion that was ever present in Goa.

A recurring term throughout fieldwork was *abundance*, when talking about the past in relation to the present. Participants said, on several occasions, that one reason why they felt so free and as though life was full of possibilities pre-pandemic was because there was a great abundance of people flowing in and through Goa, who would pay for goods and experiences. This meant that any small business had the possibility of making it. Travel economy and tourist industry alike were blossoming. Another opportunity was always around the corner. Vikram reminisced that he and his European girlfriend would be able to eat out and "pop champagne *every day* if we wanted to".

The freedom experienced by many in Goa pre-pandemic may also (in part) be seen as the result of the established hippie culture. The hippie movement is often associated with notions of freedom and self-actualisation (D’Andrea, 2007). The free lifestyle which the hippie community in Goa has been promoting can be seen as one of the building blocks of the neoliberal economic structure that dominates the travel economy in the state. Neoliberalism as an ideology also promotes freedom, which often takes the shape of economic autonomy and private ownership. In Goa, people have expressed a lack of trust in the government and wanted little involvement from the state (Hilgers, 2011). People went wherever they wanted, rode motorcycles without licence, took mind-altering substances, opened cafés on a whim and became successful entrepreneurs overnight:

> When I first got here [to Goa] I thought that Arambol was like Boom festival everyday, you know.

As the man above described, people have preconceived notions of what Goa is supposed to be. Goa had met the man’s expectations; he and his friends would party, move freely and do whatever they wanted, like at a festival. Pre-pandemic Goa was synonymous with beaches, hippies, psytrance parties, international people and freedom. Talking about Goa

as a ‘festival’ or a ‘bubble’ used to be commonplace in Goa on my first visits, before the pandemic. “Goa is not *real* India” was a common expression. Many seemed to experience Goa as a *liminal* place, which was created by the alternative Indian and international community, as a haven for alternative subcultures, where one was free to do whatever they wanted and be whoever they liked (D’Andres, 2007; St John, 2010).

2.2 Pandemic – “waves of collapse”

The waves in which COVID-19 swept over the world were sometimes referred to as “waves of collapse” by participants. Amit said that “hope was being slowly chiselled away with each pandemic wave”. The narrative of the pandemic unfolding was told to me in different iterations during the fieldwork, often with a mixture of resentment and passion. Participants seemed to view the pandemic as a paradigm shift in lifestyle and thought. In this section I aim to convey the narrative of how the pandemic unfolded, as it was commonly described during fieldwork.

2.2.1 Enforced restrictions

The most prominent impact that the pandemic had on people at large in India was restriction on mobility. India’s first lockdown came as a sudden shock to many, as it had been preceded by a rather slack approach to the pandemic by the Indian government. On March 10 2020, only 50 people were reported infected. I was in India at the time and remember this number to be largely unchanged for a week, then suddenly the restrictions started being enforced. Foreigners were refused entry on March 13. The first lockdown started on March 25 and lasted 25 days (Express Web Desk, 2021; Srivastava, 2020). One man was shocked to see how many international people left:

> Several buses left every day, *filled* with people. *Still* there wasn’t enough room for everyone. I never had imagined that there would be so many people in Arambol. Hundreds of thousands of people left during those weeks!

The Goan travel scene is not only formed through the mobility of international people, but also through the circular migration of Indians. National mobility is a baseline for survival for many Indians (Srivastava, 2020). The majority of the participants in this study come from this demographic. A lot of people working in Goa move to other places during Goa’s low

season, such as the mountains in the North, or Karnataka in the East. The restrictions on mobility meant that many people could not return home to more secure family situations. One of these people was Lena, who was stuck in Goa together with her family of seven, during the pandemic. Lena's children were paperless and could therefore not cross the state border to return to their small family farm. Health complications for her and family members immobilised them further. Lena said that he had felt hopeless; "there was no way out".

Some other participants had the funds and knowledge required to navigate the restrictions and could travel home to their families when money got scarce. Many people had spent time with their families, who owned land, during the pandemic waves. Class has thus been a deciding factor in what *regime of mobility* people belonged to during the crisis. People who had higher income among family and friends had better potential for mobility. The potential for mobility which people had during the crisis was a deciding factor in wellbeing, both physical and mental (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Srivastava, 2020).

2.2.2 Neoliberalism during crisis

Mobility potential exemplifies that how well people did during the pandemic depended heavily on their personal assets. All participants lamented over the heavy restrictions that the government had imposed on business and mobility, while not providing any support whatsoever. The lack of support may be seen as a result of the neoliberal economy, with its freedom and lack in governmental involvement (Goa Tourism, n.d.; Hilgers, 2010; Hindustan Times, 2021). The only support that was reported to me during the fieldwork was from Lena, who only received one kilogram of rice from the police when they were starving. They tried to ask for more but to no avail.:

> For four days I was only giving my children biscuits, Petra. You know Parle G? Yeah, I was giving my children these biscuits. Nobody would help. Nobody gave rice, not even a little bit...

She described that neither friends nor neighbours reached out to help them during the pandemic. They were left to fend for themselves. The landlords also raised the rents during the pandemic. She was forced to care for her husband, children and parents-in-law while paying a doubled rent, despite not having any income. I was told similar stories by people from similar backgrounds. The assets one had at the start of the pandemic was key for survival and Lena, who lived in a bamboo hut with her family, had very little.

Vikram was one restaurant owner who ran three large restaurants and one event space

pre-pandemic. He had been quick to scale down his business when he realised that he wouldn't be able to cover the rents. He set up a small restaurant from his own apartment, where he shared his bedroom with the kitchen. The setup was fairly economically viable, but it took a toll on his personal life. He had no space for himself from 9am to 9 pm every day. Other participants described Vikram's strategy as smart, especially in relation to those who kept their faith that things would go back to normal shortly and thus tried to keep their businesses running as usual.

During the first lockdown one community hostel had 40 people stuck together, from 16 different nationalities. When food became scarce in the area they were lucky to have a garden with ripe vegetables to eat. During the first 'wave of collapse' they thus had resilience, which gave them *hope* that they could regain their footing if things returned to normal soon (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 132-157). The owner told me: "My greatest mistake was keeping the properties for so long". Instead of scaling down quickly he lost his properties bit by bit. In the end he had to close them completely and struggled greatly. He was lucky to have friends and family who could support him economically. The owner was one among many who had similar stories to tell.

All travel economy stakeholders that I spoke to had to scale down to some extent, but some had to close their businesses completely. With each pandemic wave peoples' assets diminished and their businesses 'collapsed'. When successful businesses had closed, it also meant collateral damage for surrounding smaller businesses, who depended on the flow of people in and out of the larger businesses. The tea lady and her family next to a hostel, the taxi driver who had invested in a new taxi and the shop selling snacks no longer had customers; they all had to close or relocate.

2.2.3 The return of tourism

Participants lamented the process of *lifting* restrictions, which the government had allowed as well. The Goa Tourism Development Corporation Limited (GTDC) surveyed the economic impacts of the pandemic among 600 tourism industry stakeholders in Goa, to implement beneficial strategies. This contributed to the decision to open Goa tourism for Indian tourists in July 2020 (Goa Tourism, n.d.). Because of the restrictions in mobility within the state, however, the Indian tourists stayed mostly inside their accommodations. This meant that only large tourist resorts were the ones who could accommodate the tourists and they competed fiercely. A few participants argued that the large businesses that reaped the benefits of the way restrictions were lifted were not the ones that needed it the most:

> The state was busy with medical supplies and oxygen and whatnot, they don't care about small businesses like us.

In July 2020, international travellers were also allowed to return, under exceptional and heavily restricted circumstances. Tourist visas (for only 30-day visits) only started being issued again in October 2021 (Web Express Desk, 2021). Russian tourists benefitted from the setup, as Russia was deemed one of the few 'low-risk' countries. When I arrived for the fieldwork the overwhelming majority of international people in Goa were Russians.

The process of restrictions being enforced without clear end-dates and the gradual opening resulted in tourists having the ability to return, but the travel economy – which catered to backpackers and alternative subcultures – were left without income. The increase in tourism became a clash between tastes, preferences and ideologies (Bourdieu, 1998). The tourists were not interested in what they had to offer. Switching tact was costly and often undesirable. Vikram described how difficult it had been for him to change his restaurant recipes to suit the Indian tourists, as he found the Indian flavours uninspiring and not appealing for his style of cooking. Many cheap market stalls also catered to backpackers and hippies specifically. They were selling items such as T-shirts with psychedelic prints, harem pants and mandala bedsheets. These goods did not appeal to the Indian and Russian tourists. Switching out the stock completely would be too costly and the merchants who sold the clothes in bulk to them had no other stock anyway. They were stuck with goods that nobody wanted. One woman had turned to cleaning instead:

> One day I spent one whole day cleaning a backyard. One *whole* day! You know how much they gave me? 100 rupees. *100 rupees* [$1.3]!

A lot of people within the travel economy had built their businesses on ideologies. Vegan restaurants, community hostels and yoga studios did not want to simply give up their dreams and values because of the crisis. As the pandemic stretched out without an end in sight, hope diminished over time. In the end a lot of people gave up. When I arrived people seemed disheartened, hopeless and weary. The landscape was scattered with empty venues which had previously been buzzing.

2.3 Ethnographic present – “the cards have shuffled”

Amit leaves the car to pick up something from a friend. Anna and I sit quietly for a while. Suddenly she turns around in the front seat and leans over to the back, where I’m sitting. She looks at me and says:

> If there is *one* thing you should take away from Goa for your study it’s that... the cards have completely shuffled! *Everything* has been put on its head!

This section will focus on the present that I and the participants experienced during the field study.

2.3.1 A scene change

That the cards had shuffled became evident the very first night in the field. Upon arrival I was greeted with the news that Amit’s hostel (where I would be staying) had been forced to close because of the pandemic. When I arrived there was only Amit, his girlfriend Anna and two more people sitting in the quiet darkness around a small fire. The same time three years previously the place would be buzzing with some 200 people of different nationalities and backgrounds. It used to be a very popular community hostel project. Back in 2017, everybody knew about the place. The thought of it shutting down felt surreal.

The first encounter with the closed community hostel was the first of many shocks the following weeks. The landscape of North Goa had changed drastically. Though the lucrative tourism industry had slowly been changing North Goa into a more commercial tourist place for decades, the pandemic had vastly sped up the process (D’Andrea, 2007: 177). The ‘waves of collapse’ discussed previously had resulted in an economic void, which had paved the way for new businesses. Many places had kept their names but changed owners. Naomi Klein’s (2007) notion of *disaster capitalism* thus seemed to be an everyday reality for people in Goa since the pandemic. Arjun put it more bluntly: "Capitalism is meant to just eat poor people."

A couple of times I got shown around by participants in vehicles. Like a safari of times gone by, we zoomed through the landscape as the participants pointed at venues and houses and told me stories of events that had taken place there. They told me of the joy of ecstatic dance, great food, workshops held and the people they had met there. Now the places were empty and dark. Nostalgia embedded in everyday life took the shape of empty buildings

that reminded participants of loss and hardship (Stewart, 1988).

Anna told me that the new businesses were run by people "from the cities, like Delhi, with some extra cash or whatever, that they can invest". Indeed, when I spoke to people running the new places they said that they were from Delhi or Mumbai and that they had recently started up. In most cases the new businesses catered to a different crowd than those pre-pandemic. Places which had previously been low-budget backpacker hubs were now new and lavish, with mostly Indian flavours in style and taste.

A few times during the fieldwork I walked with participants along Arambol beach. Arambol beach used to be very popular among travellers to meet, hang out and play music. During the fieldwork we rarely visited Arambol. We spent most of our time on the beach in more quiet areas further South. The drum circles and hippies seemed to have moved there as well. Most of the beachfront ‘shacks’ (restaurants) had changed owners and/or names. What used to be a small collection of bamboo beach shacks were now lavish places with flourescent lighting and beach tables with living candles. Participants would look at the changes with dismay. One man expressed disgust over some of the changes:

> Do you see this shit? ‘I love Goa’, ‘I Love Arambol’, ‘I Love India’...
> It’s a joke!

This showed how rarely they went to the beach presently and how much it had changed. The important symbolic space that the beach had made up to participants did not appeal to them anymore. Participants described that they didn’t feel ‘at home’ when they walked along the beaches of Arambol and Anjuna presently. The first time during fieldwork that I visited Anjuna beach I had a similar reaction. Having lived in the area before I could see and feel the changes. The area that had previously been a home and place for community experience had changed to accommodate countless Indian weekend tourists. When participants told me that they never went to Anjuna beach anymore I could relate. I felt out of place (Bourdieu, 1998; Low, 1996; Stewart, 1988).

Figure 1: New beach shacks in Arambol

2.3.2 Opposing tourism

The state has long favoured the tourism industry over the travel economy and alternative scene, but whether the state had the intention of phasing out the travel economy in favour of the tourism industry during the pandemic is unknown. The impacts that it has had on the people of the travel economy is however clear and tangible to participants.

For the uninitiated, the travel economy and tourism industry of Goa may be perceived to be the same thing. However, upon closer inspection (and for people inside the industries) the two are vastly different. The travel economy may be seen as built on reciprocal relationships and as a means of sustaining a community. Participants described the tourism industry to be all about making money fast, no matter what, for short-term tourists who cared little about negative impacts on culture and environment. High-end tourism has indeed often been linked with conflict with local populations due to commercialisation, exploitation and environmental degradation. Business practices associated with backpacking and travellers have more often been linked to a more even spread of economic flux and a more gentle impact on local cultures and environments than tourism (D'Andrea, 2007; Xiao et al., 2013).

A central theme throughout fieldwork has been resistance expressed by participants against tourism and tourists; an active *distinction* between themselves and the tourist Other (Bourdieu, 1998; D'Andrea, 2007). Creating an 'us' through opposing an external Other, also known as *binary opposition*, has been widely discussed in anthropology (Gelder, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998). Countercultural subcultures have often been seen as formulating their common narrative through *opposing* features in the normative society (Nwalozie, 2015). The alternative scene of Goa is generally associated with strong such countercultural currents (D'Andrea, 2007).

People in the alternative scenes of Goa often strongly oppose commercialisation (D'Andrea, 2007; St. John, 2010). They considered commercialisation a destructive process. Indeed, a couple of participants witnessed a boy collapsing and dying at a commercial festival during fieldwork, due to dehydration. Amit said that when people partied using drugs, venues did not make money on alcohol sales. Venues charged greatly for water instead, which became a large and hidden expense for party-goers. Young Indian tourists came to Goa, took drugs for the first time and did not buy water. The commercial parties did not have the alternative community, which looked after one another and saved each other from dangers, such as overdoses or dehydration. Nobody was there to catch you when you fell. Amit argued that parties without a sense of community lost the care for people in favour of monetary gains. To most in the travel economy, doing business is not the same as commercialisation: It is a means to an end, such as cultivating community or living according to one's values.

I remember there being a distancing to tourism and commercialisation by people in the travel economy and alternative scenes in Goa pre-pandemic. Since the pandemic this divide seems to have grown exponentially wider. The disaster capitalist practices described above can be seen as a contributing factor to the growing divide. Strangers swooping in and capitalising on the loss of people's work may have been a growing ground for resentment (Klein, 2009). When the alternative community saw great losses in the wake of the pandemic, it might have been a necessity to further emphasise their community through opposing the tourist Other (D'Andrea, 2007). People would, for example, often rally over the shallowness of the new businesses and the short-term tourists who visited them. The reaction to the beachfront described above (see 2.3.1) is one such example.

The binary opposition with tourism highlighted what the travel economy *had* through what the tourist industry *did not.* When tourists were described as 'messy', 'loud' and 'stupid' it implied that they themselves were polar opposite of that. Major factors often highlighted when talking about tourism was that the industry lacked substance and meaning. One instance where this binary opposition became particularly clear was when Curlies organised a psytrance party. Quite a few people had been excited about the party, as they thought the DJ lineup had looked promising and the Code of Conduct[1] had just ended, which meant parties could go on all night. The party, however, did not live up to expectations. The following morning the group rallied over the party and the patrons:

[1] The Model Code of Conduct prohibits alcohol, sales and social gatherings in the evenings pre-election (CEO Goa n.d.)

> Man, I got *scared* yesterday of the crowd in Curlies. When the city people come to party, I can't tolerate it. The girls dressed like they were going to a fucking movie award night and wearing *that* to fucking Curlies!

They were joking about people smoking hookah, wearing bangles, axe perfume, glittery dresses and fancy shirts. They joked that the city tourists seemed unintelligent and that the music was boring. Anna said "this was the *last* time we're going to Curlies". It was evident that participants could spot with ease who was a tourist and not, based on clothing and behaviour. They made sure to keep their distance, physically and socially. Participants and other apparent psytrance-aficionados stayed along the periphery while the 'city people' tumbled around merrily in front of the stage. Emphasising the divide between themselves and the tourists created a cohesiveness in the group, which was different to that of groups going to psytrance parties pre-pandemic. Previously, anyone had been invited to join the group and people flowed between groups. Now, the group made seemingly no contact with strangers, unless they were evidently *not* tourists (Bourdieu, 1998; Gelder, 2007).

Changes in the *subculture geography*, through tourists claiming space and pushing the alternative scene to the periphery, is what I perceive has happened in North Goa at large as well. Travel economy businesses have shrunk, relocated or closed and tourism has taken over. 'Alternative' businesses used to be placed along the coastline. Since the pandemic they have been pushed further in-land. Now you need a vehicle to get the full 'Arambol experience', as the alternative event venues and restaurants are situated mostly in the surrounding villages or jungles. 'Good' psytrance parties tend to be underground and take place in the jungle. Some participants considered relocating to a neighbouring state (D'Andrea, 2007: 177; Gelder 2007; Low, 2006).

2.3.3 Beyond the monetary

One evening, Vikram took me to a large but broken banyan tree. He got off the scooter and walked towards the tree. Looking up at the thick gnarly branches stretching towards the night sky he wistfully told me of all the memories he had from the place. He had gone to workshops and ecstatic dance there every week and met friends, old and new. During the pandemic the banyan had fallen in a cyclone and the business hosting events under the banyan had closed. The banyan had been important to the alternative community. They had gotten together and tried to salvage the branches for propagation and building material. It had been a great communal effort. Now the banyan was dead, the people were gone and the events there would

happen no more. The banyan exemplified how places, businesses and people formed reciprocal relationships; each were important parts of a community. Places that had changed and businesses that closed meant more to people than money.

Some businesses that had been forced to close were mourned, like the death of a friend. One such example is one of the major party venues, Shiva Valley, which used to arrange psytrance parties every Tuesday. People would keep track of weekdays simply because of these parties. When I arrived the venue had closed for parties for a long time. It had turned into a restaurant full-time. When they restarted the parties the crowd attending were not the same as before; they were tourists. Another popular party venue, Hilltop, had started hosting techno parties instead of psytrance, as it suited the tourist crowd better. One participant said: "Petra, would you believe that techno has taken over Goa? Yes, it's true!". When participants found out that Hilltop would be hosting a 'Bollywood night' one weekend it seemed to be almost too much to handle. People mourned the loss of the space and the platform for community experience that the venues had provided.

Figure 2: Major psytrance club turned restaurant

For many, business is a powerful tool in fostering community, enabling cultural exchange and living according to one's ideologies (Hann, 2017). Entrepreneurs within the travel economy were eager to give advice and help one another. Several participants believed that they were promoting a good and just lifestyle through their work. For example, several hostels introduced composting, recycling and circular economical practices to travellers and locals. Some tried to inspire others to consume and eat more sustainably and ethically through serving vegan food that was locally and organically sourced. When these people had to close or reduce their businesses this then gave them a lack of agency in contributing to a cause

which they considered important and just. Amit, for example, did not earn any personal income from his community hostel:

> It was like a crazy social experiment [...] [it] was never a business for me [...] it was never about money.

He said that it was a project intended to inspire people. He wanted to show others what he had experienced while travelling: deep connections with people, across borders and cultures. Living a cosmopolitan lifestyle together with the international community had meant a great deal to all participants. The loss of that lifestyle and the community was described by many as the most difficult impact of the pandemic. To Amit, the memories of the hostel, the community and the lifestyle that had disappeared with it seemed to haunt him everyday (Stewart, 1988).

2.4 Future – “stay alive and get through this"

That first night, when I arrived and we sat around the small campfire, I asked Amit: “So, what now? What’s the plan?” He looked at me intently for a moment, then he sighed, leaned back and said, “Well… just to stay alive and get through this.” In this section, I will discuss how the pandemic has affected the participants’ perception of the future; how they perceive their possibilities and what they strive for.

2.4.1 Minimising uncertainty

One day Sumit got the sudden news that he had to pay a year’s hostel property rent in advance (in bulk) to his landlord. It startled friends as well as himself: “Fuck, if [*his* hostel] cannot survive, noone can!”. Similar expressions had been made regarding a couple of other major hostels and event venues that were about to close or had already closed since the pandemic. Such remarks exemplifies the low sense of hope experienced by many participants. To Sumit and the others, such threats from landlords signalled that another tough period was to come; another ‘wave of collapse’.

Increasing uncertainty and diminishing hope are often seen as detrimental to mental health within anthropology of disasters (Browne, 2016; Button, 2010). Bryant and Knight describe the ‘horizon of expectation’ to be a core part of how we perceive our present. They argue that expectation gives a sense of direction and orients our actions in the present. To lose

one's outlook of the horizon of expectation makes us feel lost. Having a future narrative is like having a promise of something to come. The pandemic ripped away participants' outlook of their timespace horizon. The lack of clarity regarding the end of the pandemic and when life would 'return to normal' was frequently mentioned as distressing (2019: 49-104).

It was evident that people strived to minimise uncertainty in their lives. Businessmen who rarely practised religion before the pandemic, were suddenly seen diligently performing their daily poojas in restaurant corners, for good luck. Ladies were seen working in the fields, which were described to have grown tenfold since the pandemic, as people tried to ensure that they had food and could get some extra income, in case of another pandemic wave. Most participants had spread out income over multiple businesses. If one source of income failed they were not left without. If they had the technological know-how (or the right contacts) this often meant that business moved online; online retail, consultancy and poker were common alternative sources of income. Vikram described that he had never been able to keep his restaurant without his business online. Some bided their time with starting up again to not risk failure.

Figure 3: The local crop fields had grown exponentially since the pandemic

Many described being more careful with whom they got close to as well, as people they considered friends had vanished when they needed them the most, often after benefitting from their business or knowledge without giving back. Some 'friends' had started up mirror images of their businesses (sometimes with almost the same name) without consent and tried to take over their economic niche. The travel economy, which was based on reciprocity, fell short when people felt like they had to fend for themselves. The pandemic thus caused great rips in the social fabric (Browne, 2016; Hann, 2019).

The new tourism based economic climate also made the seasons unpredictable. Pre-pandemic Goa used to be buzzing during the cooler dry season and go into a recuperative slumber during monsoon. Many businesspeople moved up North, as low season in Goa meant high season in the mountains. The short-term tourists, however, arrived at any time in the year. Weekends tended to be busier than the weekdays, but there could be minor peak seasons at any point in the year, even during monsoon. The erratic flow of people was distressing to many business owners, both in the tourism industry and travel economy.

People who had previously been known to be spontaneous to their core started valuing resilience and stability. For participants, this meant planning well, biding their time or buying properties instead of renting. As is common within neoliberal thought, private ownership was often described as one of the only means of achieving security (Hilgers, 2011). One couple described their next step to be to find land on which they could farm, to create stability for themselves and their extended families. They wanted them and their parents to have a "good life" and a "good retirement"; free from worries and uncertainty. Buying properties was described as 'nearly impossible' in Goa, however, as landlords made great profits from the large number of renters.

2.4.2 Freedom

Let us return to the notion of *freedom*, as it has been a central theme for participants throughout fieldwork. Much discourse surrounding the future goals and ambitions circulated around reaching for freedom and the strive for freedom has been ever present in practice and discourse among participants. Freedom for participants generally meant not being restricted by anything in doing whatever and going wherever one wanted; having agency over one's life. Participants described wanting a 'simple', 'secure' and 'free' life. Freedom for many participants also meant achieving the kind of security where one is able to take risks and live without worry. Retaining agency over mobility has been a central theme; all participants described wanting to be able to travel as a future goal.

I perceived that people stressed the importance of freedom in their lives more now than previously in Goa. One reason why freedom has become increasingly important may be because of restrictions experienced during the pandemic. People described feeling 'stuck' and 'hopeless' and desperately wanted to feel free again. Regaining the freedom that was experienced pre-pandemic in Goa was often highlighted. In neoliberal fashion, business was for many seen as a means of achieving freedom (Hilgers, 2011). Wealth was never described as an end goal in itself.

The expression ‘sab kuch milega’ (see 2.1.2), which used to be used daily pre-pandemic, was never really used during fieldwork at all. I believe this shift in discourse to signify a shift in belief. ‘Sab kuch milega’ signified a belief in infinite possibilities, which was a belief that many held pre-pandemic. During fieldwork I perceived this belief to be gone, or greatly diminished. As described in 2.4.1, people were more cautious than before and planned their next step carefully, to not risk losses. During the pandemic many lost agency over their lives and had been under the mercy of overarching structures in society. Previously, societal structures had had little impact on participants’ agency. They had done business from a place of abundance, now they did business from a sense of scarcity. The narrative of people’s future possibility had changed and their sense of agency over their lives seemed diminished (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 49-77).

2.4.3 Normality

Several participants described that they would not try to restart their businesses like before unless ‘things go back to normal’. Whether things eventually would ‘go back to normal’ was debated. Participants changed their view on the matter often, sometimes several times a day. What ‘normal’ represented differed between participants, but a common theme was that the pre-pandemic past was idealised as a future goal. The notion carried a sense of hope, but hope was a treacherous thing. Many had lost a lot because they retained a sense of hope during the pandemic (see 2.2.2) and many seemed afraid of hoping too much.

Bryant and Knight write that when life is altered involuntarily there is commonly a strive to return to how things were before, to a ‘state of normality’. The past is thus used to *speculate* upon present and future circumstances (2019: 49-104). Similarly, Stewart writes that memories are a constant and guiding companion: “Nostalgia becomes the very lighthouse waving us back to shore – the one point on the landscape that gives hope of direction” (Stewart, 1988: 229). Many participants described that they lived their best life before the pandemic. Since many had migrated to Goa intentionally they had actively chosen the life they had had. People described feeling lost, when life as they knew it had been swept away.

Most importantly however, ‘back to normal’ meant for most the return of international people to Goa – the ‘tribe’. Most of my participants valued the social aspects of the travel economy most of all. They had a vibrant social life before the pandemic, with people from all over the world. I was daily told stories of adventures that had happened and ‘characters’ that had passed through. The travellers passing through their businesses and through Goa had meant a lot. It became especially evident through how people treated me, as a Swedish

traveller. I was told I was one of the only non-Russian or Indian people to come to Goa for a very long time. People were eager to host, show me around and do things the way they had used to. I was also told, however, that this was not how life generally was presently. They rarely went to parties or restaurants, or went out much at all. It seemed as though I had an invigorating effect on them, through signalling that international people may return shortly. I brought a sense of hope.

When elements of 'old Goa' were present during fieldwork it brought a great sense of joy to participants. One such example was when the annual Arambol Carnival was held. The Arambol community, young and old, got together to create the carnival. Art, live music and elaborate costumes filled the beach. Spirits were high, people were dancing, laughing and walking in a large procession down the beach together. Art, live music and elaborate costumes filled the beach. The participants were excited, as the carnival was the first expression of Arambol life – as it used to be – for two years. It brought great happiness to participants.

Figure 4: The Arambol Carnival

The same day as the carnival took place, on February 24th, Russia invaded Ukraine. The great number of Russians who were presently in Goa made the news highly relevant to participants. Many became worried that the war would disrupt the world economy yet again and stop international people from returning to Goa. It was as though the hope of normality that had started to build up as restrictions lifted was once again thwarted. Many feared and lamented the notion that the life that they had built pre-pandemic was gone forever. The pandemic seemed to be one of many crises yet to come.

3. Conclusion

This dissertation is not an exhaustive account of pandemic impacts, but rather a qualitative exploration of local realities of people's lives since the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluations of pandemic impacts often concern strictly economic dimensions. When this field study commenced in January 2022 the impacts on social life, cultural practices and mental health were virtually absent from public discourse. This dissertation highlights the need for a more nuanced approach. As the ethnographic discussion shows, the effects of the pandemic on travel economy stakeholders of North Goa are multifaceted.

In wake of the pandemic countless people have struggled, not only financially, but also lost community, friendships and sense of home. The neoliberal economic climate of Goa, which provided great freedom and prosperity before the pandemic, left many people without support and income when crisis struck. The way pandemic restrictions were enforced and lifted were described as 'waves of collapse': It enabled forces of *disaster capitalism* to take place (Klein, 2007). It crippled the travel economy and the alternative community, while it enabled the tourist industry to swoop in and gain a greater foothold in the region. This has greatly altered the landscape, both physically and socially.

Countless travel economy businesses have closed. Others have switched owners or changed their branding, to cater to the new waves of tourists. Such businesses were not only sources of income but often also manifestations of peoples' dreams and values. People lost places which would previously bring the community together and cultivate a lifestyle which they had actively chosen and considered just. Participants describe a strong opposition to tourism and not feeling at home anymore in places they used to. They were pushed to the periphery in favour of tourism and commercialisation; The 'scene' has changed, and continues to change.

Participants perceive their current living situation as unstable and precarious. Many participants work hard to establish a future with less uncertainty, which will be resilient to crises, through neoliberal practices of entrepreneurship and private ownership. People who would previously feel free to improvise now structure their life and plan carefully, to avoid hardship and loss. The sense of freedom and agency which people describe feeling before the pandemic has thus been diminished or lost, as well. Participants have hoped against hope that 'things will go back to normal', i.e. go back to the way it was pre-pandemic.

In the light of the hardships caused by pandemic restrictions on people and communities in Goa, I argue that greater attention should be paid by authorities to local cultural variations, to minimise loss and hardship during crises yet to come. If the dissertation

has sparked more questions than it has answered, I believe that it has fulfilled its purpose of bringing the field of crisis and culture forward.

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