HALf6 – Part 1: *What is the New Normal?
Column by Jurriaan de Vos
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What is normal? Every human being has another understanding of the very same word. Normal is just the moment before change. Normal is the way we subconsciously write the script of today, thinking it was written already. Normal is the thing we follow from our past, to shape the present into a future just like the past. Normal is comfortably watching the same Netflix series over and over again. Normal is knowing who you work for, but not what you work for. Normal is the same supermarket every day, and it's apparently normal that shelves are always filled. It's also normal to see people sleeping under bridges or in parking lots. Normal to see riots and Instagram models right next to each other in my news feed. Normal to see pain, hunger and suffering between two episodes of some comedy show. It's normal to be silent, it's normal to be politically correct and its normal to cling to your beliefs like your life depends on it. It's normal to be a casual racist, a right-winger or a leftie, or an activist who preaches 'black lives matter', yet at the same time buys new oppression and modern slavery by ordering random items from China because it's free shipping from across the globe. It's normal to shut your eyes, ears and mouth. Normal to see yourself as insignificant in the geo-political games, and to rid yourself of responsibility. It's normal to blame things on capitalism, yet also normal to partake in the daily rat race that makes up the very core of it. It's normal to be a writer of the next page of normal.

Along came corona.

Along with it, came a new normal. A new normal that came faster that we assumed possible. In a few weeks it was normal to see peoples living room through their webcam, normal to get free money from the government, normal to have clear skies in Beijing, clear water in Venice and wild animals in cities. Normal to have a city centre without a million tourists, have highways without traffic jams, and finally have enough personal space in public transport. Also, it became normal to wash your hand 12 times a day, normal to work every waking hour because you can work from home anyway. It became normal to accept an upcoming financial crisis, normal to be lonely, normal to long for human touch, normal to stay inside all day. It became weird to work out, weird to drink beer, weird to see friends. It became forbidden to be close with friends, or to be in public transport without a face mask. It became normal to look deep into peoples eyes, because it's the only way to see them smile. It became normal to be unemployed, hard to go on vacation or travel at all. It became normal to let go of democratic principles or legislation processes in the name of public health. It became normal to give up more and more of our privacy for the same reason.

In short, within a few weeks the whole world took a u-turn. We are now far away from what was normal just a few months ago. So the question rises, what do we want to go back to?

I hope the room for stillness becomes the new normal. I hope the privilege of reflecting on oneself becomes common good. I hope the rat race of productivity makes place for slow-paced and sincere creativity. I hope we will no longer be afraid of each other for various reasons. And to quote Rafael, I hope to feel at home in the place where I live.

Lara very clearly explained that one person cannot write the script of the future, but everyone can influence it. I want to influence it. We may all be small, but it would be a comfortable lie to say that we are insignificant.

As Rafael said in the beginning, this is a time of truth. And my truth is, I don't want to go back. I want tomorrow's normal to be even more different. We STILL embrace racism, slavery and oppression in our everyday lives. We STILL think we can burden the earth with multicolored pollution. We STILL shape every day according to what's normal. To change the norm is to change the future. It's STILL up to us.