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Rethink Everything 2: Markets, Globalization, Development

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Markets, Globalization & Development Review

Rethink Everything 2: Markets, Globalization, Development

Introduction

In a previous issue of MGDR, Volume 5 - Number 1, we started the process of exploring how the pillars, indeed the foundations, of this journal – and of course the entire global system – are being affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In that issue, the authors and the editors explored how consumption and consumers, the social media, the sociopolitical ethos, and popular culture are changing or could change in response to the pandemic (Cambefort 2020; Dholakia and Atik 2020; Hong 2020; Kwet 2020; Ozgun 2020).

We realize that it will take years, even decades, to unravel and understand the massive changes brought about by this globally pervasive and vexingly difficult pandemic. At least in the electronic pages of MGDR, we have launched the process of exploration of the ongoing massive changes, and we would monitor and nurture such exploration. This issue represents the second step by MGDR in this exploration.

Possible Scenarios for the Proximate Future

Future-oriented thinkers have begun to forecast possible scenarios for the post-pandemic world (e.g.; Blumenthal et. al 2020; Neufield et. al 2020), and they see opportunities for change towards a better future in times of crisis. Equally, they also see possible darker times ahead. Neufield et. al (2020) state that a “... complete return to ‘old normality’ is unlikely and, maybe, to some extent undesirable” (p.4). The authors – in cooperation with twenty-five forward-looking minds from politics, media, journalism, business and civil society – propose six scenarios about how the world could look like in five years’ time. We summarize these six scenarios in Table 1, as well as the dream case and catastrophic scenarios proposed by Blumenthal et. al (2020); and add two of our own. To crystalize the extremes, we have omitted the middle case scenario of Blumenthal et. al. The two Blumenthal et al. scenarios in the table are more concerned with the health care system whereas the first six are more comprehensive. In some cases, we have taken the editorial liberty of modifying the original labels of the scenarios. The last two scenarios are based on our ongoing observations of the global pandemic for over a year – and represent longer timeframes than “proximate future”. These two scenarios are even more ‘macro’ in scope, and historical-philosophical in their orientation, than the scenarios based on Neufield et. al (2020).

Table 1: Some Scenarios for the Proximate Post-Pandemic Future

	Scenario	Key Aspects, Features	Factors Supporting this Scenario	Comments
1	New Golden Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just and green new deal • A strong appreciation for social and community-oriented professions • New rights for workers • Self-determined, free and sustainable life • Revising the quality of life values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments play a prominent role as providers of public goods • Populist parties lose support • A politically and economically unified Europe and democratically governed US • Free and independent media 	Golden Age for who? Rich will get richer?
2	Varieties of Localism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking and acting locally • Separatist tendencies (inclusive communities versus ethnically homogenous local communities) • Regional identities • Cooperatives and communal organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local councils acting for local aims • Local cooperatives 	<p>Segregation will rise</p> <p>There will be local realities (just or unjust; sustainable or not sustainable)</p>
3	Radical Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of trust in collective systems • Most companies will reduce their investments and their commitment to society • There is no public support or state-funded basic research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly individualized physical and digital gated communities • Economically powerful corporations • Economically powerful people 	Inequalities will rise

	Scenario	Key Aspects, Features	Factors Supporting this Scenario	Comments
4	Welfare Technocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientists are actively involved in political decision-making • Critical voices in science and media remain marginalized • Societal polarization is a constant factor of uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert commissions play a major role • Governments invest massively in the expansion of digital infrastructures • Populist tendencies are on the rise 	<p>During this pandemic, massive wealth transfers to techno-elites did occur</p> <p>Acceleration of such transfers could usher in this scenario</p>
5	National Populism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian, illiberal understanding of the state • Disintegration of social democracy • Decline in press freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populist governments in the West • China is the hegemon of a populist authoritarian world order 	There are geopolitical headlines daily that point to the possibility of such a world
6	Same Old, No Gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything is back to pre-pandemic conditions • Well-educated and better-offs were less affected • Economic globalization continues • Pre-crisis social inequalities remain • Chances of a new vision for society diminish 	Conservative politicians are elected for propagating in-group solidarity and a reliable and predictable style of governing	<p>This is the sophisticated neo-Trump world</p> <p>Leaders have learnt the lessons and avoid the flagrant missteps, mistakes and corruption of Trump</p>
7	Continuous Nightmare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance against implementing non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) such as facial coverings and physical distancing • Antiviral treatments and vaccines are not as effective as expected • The economy struggles • Rising unemployment • Population herd immunity proves illusory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care system is overrun by COVID-19 cases to the exclusion of most other care • Demand exceeds capacity - supply of health care workers, personal protective equipment (PPE), testing supplies, and drugs 	<p>This is close to the “catastrophic” scenario in Blumenthal et al. (2020)</p> <p>The failure of employer sponsored insurance may create the national will for universal public insurance.</p>

	Scenario	Key Aspects, Features	Factors Supporting this Scenario	Comments
8	Quick Passing Nightmare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPIs are implemented with strong public compliance. • Anti-viral treatments are effective • Vaccines are effective and widely applied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large institutions survive the pandemic; financially weak hospitals disappear • The weak will be weaker and the strong stronger? 	This is our characterization of the “Dream case” scenario in Blumenthal et al. (2020)
9	Cold Bipolar Universe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pervasive and persistent misery and immiserating conditions for most • Rich superelite escape to exclusive and guarded enclaves of luxury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends already evident (yachts, luxury bunkers) • Refugee camps, already proliferating, become way of life for most 	See the review of the movie ‘Elysium’ in this issue (Ulusoy 2020)
10	Crimson Glorious Dawn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A just, verdant, sustainable, supportive, and multihued sociopolitical, cultural, economic ethos takes hold • Post-capitalist forms emerge and diffuse in adaptive, tolerant ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial changes – such as Universal Basic Income (UBI) – are gradual and experimental • Multiple pro-humanity and pro-nature initiatives mingle and jell 	Commentators like Mason (2020) and others hold that past pandemics brought about collapse of old oppressive systems such as slavery and feudalism.

Source: Based on Neufield et al. (2020); Blumenthal et al. (2020), and Authors’ research

Neufield et. al (2020) suggest that for a chance to renew our societies, more democracy is needed, especially in times of crises and a reshaping of economy towards more equality, sustainability, and technological progress. A commitment to international cooperation and promoting a more active role for the state are also needed. Similarly, Blumenthal et al. (2020) emphasizes the need for a stronger federal government in the United States to mitigate the adverse effects of the health crisis.

Contributions in this Issue

In her commentary, Vicdan (2020) discusses how platformization of patient/citizen-led medical research is organized through biosocial surveillance with increasing participation and active role of patients. The author argues that “platformization of covid further responsabilizes the patient citizen in generating data and tracking the virus, hence giving a sense of control to the patient over medical data generation and patient

care through digital biosocial communities” (p.4). For example, platforms like PatientsLikeMe have been beneficial for defining and tracking the coronavirus symptoms and comparing the treatments. Vicdan, however, also draws attention to how such platforms can increase patient-citizen vulnerability and inequalities through surveillance capitalism, with corporations making profits out of vast amounts of patient data. She stresses the need to reorient biosocial surveillance in the best interest of patient citizens and public health.

In the second commentary in this issue, Mizukoshi and Hidaka (2020) discuss how aid-providing consumption – Ōen consumption, to use the Japanese term, that boosts and supports, especially small business entities – which they simply label as ‘aid consumption’, has increased in Japan during the pandemic. Aid consumption is about helping local businesses by buying their products and services. The authors clarify the difference between aid consumption and more familiar concepts such as the cause-related consumption or ethical consumption. They argue that it is different from cause-related consumption because “the purchase itself implies support and help without the presence of other causes” (p.2), and it is different from ethical consumption because “the purchase itself does not give consumers additional benefits, such as being more natural or healthier” (p.2). The contrasts between charity and Ōen consumption are sharp and require careful examination. A review of food charity in the U.S. pointed to the massively exponential rise in donated food in the past few decades, and pointed to deep corporate capitalist involvement in support of food charity rather acting in favor of reforms to minimum wage and boosting of government food assistance programs (Lakhani 2021). It may be useful – in setting such as the United States, where there is excessive reliance on charity – to examine helping options that are neither charity nor government assistance. In this unique commentary, the authors present aid or Ōen consumption as a potential new form of social assistance based on market principles in the unique context of Japan where donations are not very popular due to cultural reasons.

Reviews in this Issue

Karanfil (2020) – in his review of the book *People’s Tech for People’s Power: A Guide to Digital Self Defense and Empowerment* by Michael Kwet (2020) – emphasizes how people around the world have become much more vulnerable to corporate and government surveillance with the increasing digitalization and developments in information and communication technologies. The review author praises the book for being an excellent source to guide ordinary people in their struggles to protect themselves from digital surveillance and digital colonialism. “The reader is informed on issues such as data protection, password

management, possible choices for operating systems and app stores, video surveillance and internet decentralization” (p.4). This review extends the dialogue piece in MGDR where Kwet (2020), the author whose book Karanfil reviews, drew the readers’ attention to the increasing social media usage during the pandemic lockdown – with potential as well as actual spread of misinformation – and the need to transition away from the digital capitalism of giant tech corporations and toward digital socially-controlled ‘digital commons’ style platforms and media.

Ulusoy (2020) reviews the film *Elysium* which he considers a political dystopic movie, written and directed by Neill Blomkamp. According to the author, the movie provides a critique of capitalism picturing a dystopian world where the ultra-rich 1% of the world’s population lives in a pristine high-tech space station Elysium, enjoying prosperous and luxurious lives, while the rest of the people, the 99%, struggle in poverty and ecological catastrophe on a wretched, terrestrial earth. Ulusoy stresses the striking parallels between the movie and today’s realities having rich and poor people experience the pandemic quite differently. At one end of the spectrum, the ultra-rich people enjoy private yachts, jets, and islands to isolate themselves from the pandemic along with their private doctors and test kits. On the other end of the spectrum, frontline/essential personnel – ranging from doctors and nurses to janitors and delivery people – take health-risks and work for their survival. “Corporations and governments that are driven by the neoliberal agenda place profits and business continuity before the health and well-being of their employees and citizens” (Ulusoy 2020, p.6), and the economically most developed countries get access to vaccine first. Ulusoy suggests “the massive polarizations that exist between the wealthy and poor reflect more of what already exists under capitalism/plutocracy today than any imaginary dystopian future” (p.8). It is clear from this movie review as well as the review of the movie *Contagion* by Ozgun (2020) that the emerging patterns of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as possible unfolding post-pandemic scenarios, were already imaginable by creative writers and moviemakers. For the future, therefore, it would be smart and wise to keep an eye on creative forms that may foretell the paths and scenarios ahead of us before the future actually unfolds.

Concluding Comments

As of the date of writing this editorial piece, even with progress in vaccination efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic was nowhere near being controlled. In fact, European countries that had achieved a reasonable measure of success in controlling the virus were experiencing troublesome bouts of resurgence of infections, with concomitant deleterious economic impacts. India had climbed to the second spot in

terms of COVID-19 infections, just behind the United States, and early containment gains were being lost. Brazil was in an even worse shape, with rapid rise in hospitalizations and deaths; and as a breeding ground for new variants of the virus.

For everyone –ranging from scientific medical researchers, social scientists, and public policymakers to businesspeople and citizen-consumers– the stark reality is that constant precautionary vigilance and extreme operational diligence have to become a way of life. Of course, as people, as humans, we do tend to lapse into easier and riskier modes of living and doing things – comfortable, familiar, traditional ways of life that, indeed, may require penetrating questioning and constant efforts toward ameliorative forms and ends, as some of the scenarios in Table 1 point to. At MGDR, we hope not to fall into the old ruts, and to keep questioning and pursuing ameliorative ends; but only time will tell.

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