**REDEFINING GLOBALIZATION FROM COVID 19 CRISIS: A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract:**

This discourse analysis aimed to expose the context of globalization in the face of COVID 19 pandemic. I contend to refute the notion that globalization is the same before and during the pandemic crisis. Moreover, I seek to bring out the contextual landscape of social and cultural changes as influenced by pandemic and how the conduct of globalization in terms of power struggle, digitalisation, debt and geographies of blame, care, interdependence, infection, immunization, vulnerability and resilience are being redefined in its optimum level.

**Keywords:** COVID 19, Power Struggle, Digitalisation, Debt, Geographies.

**Introduction**

*Change is coming*, as incumbent President Rodrigo Duterte would claim during the heights of his political campaign about four years ago. But then, the inevitability of change does not always dependent on its positive repercussions, but more undeniably goes with disadvantageous bearings of its reality. The world today continue to encounter a common enemy—COVID 19 Pandemic. The blatant call for redefinition of the local interest should be reoriented in a perspective that the interest of countries today cannot be achieved in isolation from the interest of the others since all countries and states of the world participate in countering the threats resulting from cross borders such as this pandemic. This paper argues that even though this pandemic is socialized in its global incursion, it is not practical to deal with it in romanticized fashion through political make up in the face of the duality of life and death. The theory of realism appears to provide solutions to all countries and peoples, while the problem of utopian political ideas such as idealism remains challenged from the standpoint that they do not start from the tangible reality on the ground. It is then the contention of the author in this paper that the combination of notions in globalization is deemed necessary. Furthermore, I seek to bring out the contextual landscape of social and cultural changes as influenced by pandemic and how the conduct of globalization in terms of power struggle, digitalisation, debt and geographies of blame, care, interdependence, infection, immunization, vulnerability and resilience are being redefined in its optimum level.

**Power Struggle**

We all know that COVID 19 outbreak is a predominant factor of lockdowns in many countries. But then how governments react and respond is dictated by politics. Politics is said to be the study of the influence of the influential. Amidst the inevitability of the situation now, the World Health Organization (WHO) released efforts to coordinate advice to states and offer ongoing management of the outbreak (Davies & Wenham, 2020). On this event, I argue in this paper that this is an important moment to advance International Relations knowledge as a necessary and distinctive method for inclusion in the WHO repertoire of knowledge inputs not only for epidemic but also for pandemic management. According to Mbazangi et al. (2020), aside from conspiracy theories over pandemic, CHINA and USA have higher chances of triggering World War III, COVID 19 has seen hidden variables and prevalent among them is the threat to global peace in an attempt by CHINA to alter the world order. States today are investing in conventional warfare undermining unforeseen threats to national security, health pandemic, natural disasters and corruption.

On the realm of this pandemic, we are eye-witnesses to the surge of nationalism on our globalized world. Using the lenses of cultural sociological approach on the two major competing superpowers (CHINA & USA), I would like to point out that the struggle for power is a unique redefinition of this pandemic to international relations. There is a meaning-making mechanism behind the hermeneutical reconstruction of the “reactive performance” of each country, as it is clear in political speeches and mass media. “From the vantage point of Chinese narrative, the country emerges from the “century of humiliation,” becoming a world major power that will no longer be succumb to bullying of the West. However, in the U.S narrative, even though Trump initially highlights the country’s very good relationship with China, as the story reveals, China is blamed for the global pandemic, assuming again the role of a dangerous actor on the world stage” (Jaworsky & Qiaoan, 2020). On account of this meaning making process, I argue that the current communicative mechanism is not only unsustainable, but also dangerous in this time of catastrophe. It is imperative then that the recognition of the narrative battle and identification of its performative function within the public sphere is the important initiative toward collaboration and mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue between these two world powers. In lieu with this, I do not undermine the possibility that the pandemic is a crisis that will reshuffle the decks, producing a fundamental reordering of global politics. Furthermore, there is also a possibility that the basic principles of the international order are likely to remain much the same, driven largely by the emerging bipolar system between the US and China. I, then found the narratives dissatisfying, as the former over interprets the causal role of the pandemic itself, while the latter under appreciates the critical ways in which global politics have been transformed beyond the state-centered system in the Cold war. I contend, then, that globalization under the spectrum of power struggle needs to be showcased not just as a distributional game of winners and losers. Rather, there should be a more profoundly transformational game that reshapes identities redefines channels of power and authority and generates new sites for arguable politics.

**Digitalisation**

With the avoidance of face to face interaction, COVID 19 also sparked the massive dependence of states on communications through digitalization. The proliferation of meetings, conventions, conferences on a cross border basis became the common trend among states and governments. Digitalisation nowadays does not only rely its surface on the level of the individual actors but also of the states in their continuous advancement and protection of their interests in international relations. Faced with the potential threat of infection transmission through the physical space of places, the virtual space of flows has gained expedited relevance and centrality. In the immediate health crisis, COVID-Tracking is said to be the key to East Asia’s successful containment efforts (Huang, Sun, & Sui, 2020). Online working and digitally organized logistics mitigated the impact and promise to be expanded during recovery. Oldekop et al. (2020) claimed that data is an enormously significant economic asset with major opportunities and necessity for use of new datasets, but also carries the potential for privacy violations and political surveillance. In this realm, the emergence of real risks and threats to the problem of injustice will deepen as a result of pandemic. Digital technology and platform economy firms continue to grow in importance; companies such as Amazon, Alibaba and Google are moving to centre stage in organizing key infrastructure (Klein, 2020); gig economy platforms have been important in the COVID 19 response but they present challenges to worker wellbeing (Fairwork, 2020).

**Debt**

Brooks, Ribakova, Lanau, Fortun, & Hilgenstock, (2020) found that COVID 19 pandemic negatively implicated the public finances in three critical ways. First high levels of capital flight from low and middle-income countries has stopped new lending for them through pushing down the value of local currencies, making imports and dollar-denominated debt repayments much harder to sustain. Second, governments around the world increased their expenditures drastically. The call for continuing need for social protection for those rendered unemployed and the impoverished. Third, COVID 19 has created a crash in public revenue through taxation. The advent of the debt crisis differs dramatically from both the 1980s debt crises and the 2007-2008 world financial crises, and will not be understandable the international development paradigm. Say for instance, in the global South, international financial institutions will be involved (Kentikelenis, et al. 2020), but debt repayment negotiations will be less concentrated on them and the Paris Club. China and various private sector actors are bigger creditors. US-China competition, as we have seen, prevents the kind of coordinated multilateral response that followed the above-mentioned debt and financial crises. Another critical factor lies in the difference of managing indebtedness across almost all countries including in the global North. Within countries, there are tremendous consequences for the possibilities of effective states and political order, shaping the revenues available for social protection, health systems and food security.

**Contextualizing Geographies of COVID 19**

Putting the pandemic into its clear context is expedient to understanding its moving redefinitions of globalisation. I would like to point out the geographical work on the emergence of blame, along with research that helps explain the geographies of (2) vulnerability, (3) care, (4), infection, (5), immunisation, (6), interdependence and (7) resilience.

1. Geography of Blame

The attempt to blame China for COVID 19 and to call it the “China virus” or “Wuhan virus” is a classic instance of what Farmer and other scholars of contagion conversation have critiqued as a “geography of blame”(Farmer, 2006; Wald, 2008). This geography of blame involve the unequal attribution of disease threats to foreign countries or locales and bodies that are abstracted from the global economic, ecological and social interdependencies that create the conditions for disease emergence in the first place. Furthermore, this pandemic has led to outbreak of such scapegoating, with Trump’s “China virus” discourse and US conspiracy theories (about the virus being developed in a Wuhan lab) reciprocated by Chinese accusations that the disease was introduced to China by the CIA despite lacking of scientific evidence. In addition, other COVID 19 conspiracy theories have ranged from Islamophobic speculations about Ramadan accelerating infection in the UK, to Iranian accusations of American and Zionist COVID 19 plots, to scapegoating of Muslims in India, to Russian claims reported in a right wing American magazine that the virus is a biological weapon invented by the Pentagon.

1. Geography of Vulnerability

Another means in which geographical work can help denaturalize disease is by challenging accounts of disease victims simply being unlucky or irresponsible individuals being in the wrong place at the wrong time (Craddock, 2000; Loyd, 2014). Critical contextualization can instead support counter-arguments about how illness and disease vulnerability are themselves produced by socio-economic inequalities and insecurities (Farmer, 1999, Smith & Easterlow, 2005). Our unequal context and conditions of being human make for vast variations in vulnerability. Poverty, war precarious livelihoods, poor access to health care and basic services, and pre-existing medical conditions connected to social deprivation and dispossession are all being laid bare as contexts of vulnerability in the pandemic.

1. Geography of Care

Care as it is seen through health care workers including cleaners, nurse and doctors. The struggle for power and strong tendency to uphold nationalism is redefined international relations in such a way that a greater corroboration among states are evidently seen such as the free donation of medical supplies from the global North and South, additional health workers from China in the Philippines and other parts of the world. Yet, they (frontliners) have been hit hard during this pandemic. They also experienced being deprived of reliable supplies of personal protective equipment. They have repeatedly put themselves at risk while helping others to mitigate risk, often with the knowledge that they will be seen.

1. Geography of Infection

One of the major means in which people across the globe learn about the spread of the pandemic is through online maps of infection and case fatality rates by country and region. We witness the capitalist globalization, planetary urbanization and the neoliberalization of nature have co-created the breeding grounds for all sorts of new pathogens including other coronaviruses, thereby making COVID 19 a familiar “monster at the door” (Connolly et al., 2020; Davis, 2006; Keil & Ali, 2011; Sparke & Anguelov, 2012; Wallace, 2016).

1. Geography of Immunization

COVID 19 created its own globalization and the associated appeals to and for a global approach to protection imagined immunization geographically as ultimately having to be global and universal. Trump’s assault on the WHO led to his announcement on April 14, 2020 that his administration would halt US funding for the organization. There are scientific concerns with the promise of universality based on the ongoing mutation of the virus as it spreads globally. But the even more concerning compromises with the biomedical breakthrough visions involve the challenge of providing universal access to a vaccine in the context of global capitalist relations that have a deadly track record of biomedical exclusion though the endowment of intellectual property claims in trade rules (Lofgren & Williams, 2013).

1. Geography of Interdependence

International relations is redefined by the dependencies on pharmaceutical corporations and global trade rules are just one shining example of the many other economic interdependencies that COVID 19 has exposed. The huge shocks to global supply chains are triggered by the pandemic, including critical drug supplies and the massive global slowdown in all the economic activities surrounding consumption. Millions of workers, nowadays have been laid off overnight, with contingent workers in flexible gig employment and zero hours contracts being let go and zeroed out employment altogether. This then makes additional vulnerabilities and health burdens where there are few government supports for firms seeking to keep workers on payroll and where access to health insurance for most workers remains dependent on employment. The wider loss of work or unemployment and having no income in a world under lockdown is also creating vulnerability in a world scale basis as the possibility of a longer term global depression increases with every day of declining economic activity.

1. Geography of Resilience

In poorer countries, we have witnessed since the onset of pandemic that there is an indicator of poor disease surveillance and testing capacity in health systems which undermined by decades of debt, and structural adjustment in the global south. On the contrary, wealthier states with robust public health systems have shown significant success in keeping death rates due to COVID 19 down through the use of testing, contact tracing and social distancing. In this realm, there is still a continous donations of PPE and other testing kits coming from China and USA to the global South. The character building of each state is established through these trying times of pandemic, thus resilience in the spirit of collaboration among nations emerged. What is being left for us now are the mighty imprint of getting the bright side of this pandemic, the reflective ascendancy to wisdom and virtue, rethinking that this new normal will give us a sense of courage to go on despite our fear of the unknown and thus have a leap of faith to the new horizon that unfolds the excitement of getting far from what we traditionally known as normal.

**Conclusion**

Indeed, change is constant. The permanency of change brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic redefined the realm of globalization in international relations in ways such as the struggle for power between two opposing superpower like China and USA where the competition not only in conventional warfare, but also in technological innovations and trade war serves as prevalent themes. Along with digitalisation, the proliferation of meetings, conventions, conferences on a cross border basis became the common trend among states and governments. Digitalisation nowadays does not only depending its surface on the level of the individual actors but also of the states in their continuous advancement and protection of their interests in international relations. When it comes to the disadvantages in economy debt is inevitable feature of today’s crisis among nations. First high levels of capital flight from low and middle-income countries has stopped new lending for them through pushing down the value of local currencies, making imports and dollar-denominated debt repayments much harder to sustain. Second, governments around the world increased their expenditures drastically. The call for continuing need for social protection for those rendered unemployed and the impoverished. Third, COVID 19 has created a crash in public revenue through taxation.

After probing the trajectories as to how COVID 19 redefined globalization, I agree to the contention that the current emergency is not so much about the emergence of this pandemic or infection, but of life that is deprived of qualities, lived as mere life, and lived at the biological threshold. “Pathological lives are not the problem, but part of the solution. They are the threats to self-assurance that can force us to think again” (Hincliffe et al., 2017, p.221). I want to conclude here the evocative call to rethinking made from India by Arundhati Roy. According to her, “historically pandemics have forced human to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

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