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## World War C :

### How the COVID-19 Pandemic Should Teach Us to Consume Less and Cooperate More?

Notable world leaders, like US President Donald Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron, and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson all declared a war on the invisible enemy, Covid-19, what I will call here war C.

By talking about a 'World War C,' I am echoing Marc Forster's 2013 movie, World War Z, starring Brad Pitt as a war zones' UN consultant, who saves the world from a virus that turns people into zombies. Interestingly, it's a UN consultant who saves the day, and not the prodigy virologist in the movie. In here one finds a resounding message: reflecting on the macroscope of our societies might be more helpful than relying on a scientific analysis based on the microscope, meaning here that the lived experiences of the UN consultant on the ground, facing and understanding different peoples and different cultures turned out to be more helpful than the hard science approach of the more expert virologist.

**You have here a lesson in international cooperation: we might still need to move across our conflict zones, observe them, and understand them from our different cultural perspectives rather than be confined in our national laboratories.**

This reference to a movie is an attempt to depict how surreal the pandemic experience felt at times, and it is also a way to highlight the core argument of this piece, which is to open up as states and peoples to learn from one another, instead of shutting ourselves off each other and staying confined to our domestic concerns.

The current health crisis has soared to levels many of us didn't expect but it should not come as a surprise to us. We could have predicted what is happening, but we were collectively negligent. Epidemiologists around the world have talked about the possibility of pandemic outbreaks and history has recorded them, yet we, including the key decision makers and influencers in our states, have willfully ignored this C, maybe because of another 'C', that of consumerism. What can be done? In what follows, I would like to argue that there are things to be done :

- 1) enforce regulation,
- 2) promote global governance,
- 3) nothing less than change the world.

Our frenetic consumption and shortened attention span have become so naturally embraced that we have raised a new generation that boasts these qualities, so-called generation Z, and we are thinking of catering to its needs. Consumerism is not a necessary by-product of capitalism. A regulated capitalism in which the long-term interest is assessed could limit the inherent issues of crisis and asymmetric information, which are typical issues to capitalism as a political and economic system. Not only that, but we need a system of regulation that looks at the outlook of the integrated world economy, in addition to the forecasts for one's domestic economy, systematically. More regulation of our economic systems could have advanced more the public motive of stronger infrastructure and better public goods that now seem so crucial with the pandemic.

In terms of global governance: the global interest should become our national interest, not just out of kindness of heart, but because it is pragmatically more viable in the long term since we are ultimately interdependent, by sharing trade, resources, a planet, and a universe. Global governance must become central to our decision-making process in our political systems, not just a peripheral consideration.

If a meteorite were to annihilate earth, we would probably like to think about pooling together our efforts, and that needs preparation. The same logic goes for the need to be collectively, as dwellers on the same planet, ready for a very contagious and dangerous virus.

As of now, international cooperation has been fickle and often times biased in favor of more powerful states. International organizations excel at issuing warnings and penalties, that don't budge superpowers, while heavily hurt the periphery. On the other hand, these organizations don't show much positive reinforcement when communities of the Global South act in an exemplary manner. **These double standards have created a toxic climate of mistrust that crept into domestic policies.**

For example, a major reason behind the failed currency reform in Morocco was the central bank's doubt over the capacity of Moroccan economic institutions to help rebound the economy. Another example is Morocco's Green Plan as the plan shows again the lack of trust in the local market to strengthen the economy, since the plan is mainly geared towards exports to the European Union (EU).

The plan also limits the Moroccan government spending on vital social needs and depletes land resources for meager wages in the agricultural sector to support so-called high-added value agricultural exports. The jobs in this agricultural development plan seem to have replaced the less precarious work opportunities in the heavily reduced textile industry in Morocco\*.

**A better model of development for Morocco and beyond is one in which we trust our decision makers and influencers to genuinely serve our collective interests, because those collective interests are the ones with the more positive impact on our collective livelihoods.** I will echo late Jamaican President Michael Manley to give my thought on how to change the toxic climate of mistrust that reigns in many parts of the world, because, to me, his words say it best:

I have often remarked that you cannot change Jamaica if you do not change the world. I have never meant by this anything so naive as to suggest that little Jamaica could change the world. Nor do I mean that Jamaica can avoid its responsibility to itself. We must use our resources intelligently and manage them effectively.

No one owes us charity nor should we wish to take it were it available. On the other hand, the system works against countries like ours. Hence it is that international economic system which we must work to change (Michael Manley, Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery, 1982, p. 65).

China's constitutional amendments of 2018 reflect an ambition to change the world and push forward international cooperation. President Xi Jinping speech at the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress on October 18, 2017, and China's State Council Information Office report of September 2019, to celebrate 70 years of the Republic, and titled, "China and the World in the New Era," emphasized the tenets of this ambition: promote global governance, pave the way for a so-called ecological civilization (very important at a time in which we deplore the Anthropocene/Capitalocene and its impact on climate change), and build moderate societies. The last tenet of so-called moderate societies is hard to clearly grasp as one may see moderation very relatively, however, moderation seems to be a good cure to the 'C' of Consumerism, in its frenetic form, that we should be at war with. **In being more moderate, we might become more preventive and that sounds more sustainable.**

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\*See Zaynab El Bernoussi, "North African Textiles Shifting to Vietnam?" APAC (Asia Pacific Affairs Council) Journal, Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, Winter 2011.

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