

Decadence or Annihilation? Perceptual Re-stratifications in a Tech savvy Post-COVID-19 World

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, occurrences of more than 27 disasters have been reported across the world. The devastating phenomena varied from unparalleled floods, earthquakes, bush fires, landslides, diseases and unprecedented hurricanes. Informed by the development of the changes across the globe in effort to contain COVID-19, the article purposed to analyze the calamities that have befallen the world and their socialization impact. Guided by Kuhn's Paradigm shift theory, the analysis entailed documentary analysis of existing publications and articles themed around global issues and their effects. Using a thematic presentation, the article reported that the restructuring of social class is real and persistent. As technology grows to its heights, discoveries to some challenges are found while others resist all attempts towards the solution by human society. However, it is certain that changes in global social stratification exist in dimensions of economic capabilities, cultural practices, religious subscriptions, and in general livelihood.

Key Words: *Annihilation, COVID-19, Decadence, Global disasters, Paradigm shift theory, Social stratification*

Introduction

The COVID-19 is categorized as a deadly pandemic with intensity of attracting media coverage. Similarly, a unique feature of COVID-19 pandemic is it being a major factor in widening social stratification and differentiation which is already being felt in nations and society. Sociologists define social stratification as the hierarchical arrangement of people in society according to their power and wealth. On the other hand, Gallaher et al. (2009) define a superpower as a country having exceptional capacity among all others across the world in undertaking its missions successfully. This is same as associating the nations' supremacy among others as a 'hierarchical arrangement'.

In this article, social stratification is operationalized to denote groupings based on material resources, power and differences in social levels (occupation and class structure). This phenomenon has a rich history attributed to both natural and unnatural events that affect the society worldwide. The effects of the calamities spread indiscriminately in socio-economic and political orientations including health, religion, education, food availability and investment in general. Apparently, the unfolding of these phenomena does not bar changes in aspects of technological innovation which acts either as mitigation to an existing challenge or as a cause of a newer problem. For instance, there is evidence that associates the illness effects of World War II in Japan to technological advancement in military where nuclear bombing was used by the U.S. on Japan between 1936 and 1945. However, COVID-19 will not be perceived as a sign of complete annihilation in engulfing mankind but may be a vanguard to a decadence of (rise and fall) nations.

Structural functionalists such as Davis-Moore argue that social stratification plays an important role in society by acting as reward for those who work harder. This consequently affects the operation of society. Jobs that require expertise and talent or training need more compensation than others that would be possibly be performed by anyone. Could this be the basis of countries becoming superpower? This is an indomitable argument on whether being superpower implies being above "problems". Abdulahhi and Phiri (2019) discuss that the existing superpowers are defined by win in wars. Two devastating world wars are attributed to supremacy battle between Germany and Japan. As China fastens in the economic and technological advancement, do we expect to see some 'wars' in the near future based on clash of ideologies?

The global calamities and pandemics come and go in different perspectives. Mankind has faced a series of rampant problems ranging from successive natural calamities to economically vested exploitative wars propelled by world powers. Incidences of increasing food shortages, ecological hazards, environmental degradation and consequent loss of professional resources and social values essential for human existence, create divided class priorities. These cumulative phenomena seems to be evidence of the "man eat man society theory" (haves against the not have).

Owen (2020) states some of the worst events starting from 3000 B.C. where Circa hit China, Greece experienced plague of Athens in 430 B.C., in A.D. 250-271 Tunisia was hit by Plague of Cyprian, Asia and Europe by the Black Death in 1346-1353, the American Plagues of 16th century, yellow fever epidemic in U.S. in 1793, Flu pandemic of 1889-1890, Spanish Flu in 1918-1920, HIV/AIDs from 1981 to present, H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic in 2009-2010, West African Ebola between 2014-2016 Zika Virus epidemic from 2015-present day. The approaches to containing these events have largely been under support of World Health Organization (WHO) which significantly draws funding from developed countries. In other cases, some developed countries have shown their capabilities in handling the challenges by financing the eradications. Some

researchers like Jenkins (2007) are of the opinion that the United States uses a violence climate to create fear among nations with an intention to dominate in religious, economic and political changes. What remains unset is whether there is any supremacy recognition of the supporters in the fight against these pandemics. If yes, then one case that may restructure these stratifications is here, COVID-19. The emergence of COVID-19 in late 2019 in Wuhan China is a pointer that would change the narrative. Further, foretell to the grumbling of the western civilization (old paradigm) will be followed by clash of civilization (state of anomaly). There will be scrambling for world leadership (state of anomie or crisis). Finally, the stage of shooting to establishing a new world order (the new paradigm shift). This could be an indication that some challenges may affect global society in 'equal' measures irrespective of the social class. With each nation struggling on its own with the pandemic, it is sufficient evidence that the world blocs may get in to disintegration. Indeed, the current fragmentation of approach and prevailing mistreats among nations defeats purpose and objectives of regional dependence and unity.

The technological changes are taking shape with Artificial intelligence playing an important role in society (Oyenga & Omar, 2020). But this does not stop the problems that affect humanity today. This has implications that stream from one life aspect to another. The scientists spent sleepless nights trying to invent the remedy for the novel diseases, as religious leaders and faithfuls ponder on their belief in the promises of God, economists reviewing models that would ensure survival, and the entire system in panic mode. These factors notably classify individuals into groups making one to think whether these are the vanguards of the corroborative prophecies of the Christian and Muslim literature. The literature reveals that towards the final hour, there will be indiscriminate killings and bloodletting, unimaginable bushfires, ample rainfalls without vegetation, and multiplication of afflictions to the extent that the living will desire to be among the dead due to the complexity of the problems that will be befalling him. If neither the money of business moguls will save them nor the civilization of the west cushion them against the pandemics, the stratification changes of humanity is inevitable. This background opened space for research on changes that may be encountered in the world as man lives. Guided by Kuhn's paradigm shift theory, the article presented possible socio-economic implications of the global fatalities following the spread of the novel COVID-19. Using document analysis approach, the study is an analysis of existing documentation and publications with a thematic presentation.

Theoretical Framework

The article bears earmarks from two traditional theoretical perspectives of sociology of classical and socio-psychological views. This forms the basis for conceptualization of actions, victimization and consequences of COVID-19. However, it is narrowed to the Paradigm shift theory by Thomas Samuel Kuhn (1922–1996). Through his release of a book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962 and 1970a (second edition), Kuhn established the background for argument on how people view scientific facts and possible changes about the facts. Prior to his publication, people and philosophers looked at science in the perspective of how it (science) is supposed to evolve (Naughton, 2012). While it sounds too loud for Kuhn's contributions, the facts lie not in not only making it as an infectious idea but also in singly changing the way we would think about empiricism.

According to Kuhn, science is always experiencing changes in phases thus forming revolutions. The changes take place from an original state called "normal science" characterized by fixed

disciplinary matrix but allowing cumulative changes generated as solutions. However, the cumulative changes cause the fixed matrix to adjust automatically from one period to another. Kuhn further explains that the changes focus on specific matrix led by consensus in research (Bird, 2018). These consensuses are what are termed as paradigm. Later on in the second edition of the book (1970a), Kuhn opines that the research changes that are agreed upon are always seen as novel and least understood. All these are driven by a common aspect of research problem which is solved systematically in three stages including; process of crisis, revolution and creation of new normal science. This is referred to as mature stage while the immature science is described as having been in the pre-paradigm period where it lacks consensus. The consensus is built by competing concepts of various researchers and theorists on social life who must come to settle on a single verdict.

Kenton (2019) interprets a paradigm shift as a significant change in a phenomenon in the way it works or is approached. A paradigm shift is thought as aspect of life that possibly happens in a variety of contexts. Kenton continues to opine that the shift in contemporary society takes place in a context of technology which is the major cause of the change. Introduction of technology triggers the evolution of a given process to either more economically or more easily achievable results.

The application of paradigm shift to the social stratification across the globe cannot be ignored. While technology has triggered a number of changes which consequently sparks “paradigm” changes, major changes in civilization, modernization, globalization, villagilization and social classes have been engineered by natural phenomenon and especially epidemics and pandemics. Association of several pandemics to acknowledging the global positions of states are evident. While the “pre-paradigm” periods have been changing, the consensus has always settled with different perceptual social stratification in society. Looking at social stratification as the level of abilities to afford certain social services and amenities has been significantly affected by pandemics and trends of global challenges. States as individuals gain their supremacy from the abilities to handle global challenges and the power of their support in such problems.

The critics of Kuhn’s work have largely been fellow philosophers. However, a number of them were quiet on it as it was self-explanatory with clear link to existing scientific facts. The two outlined criticism to the theory is that the development of facts as science is not accurate; and that the assumption of incommensurability is not a problem as such. Despite these perceived shortcomings of Kuhn’s theory, it has played a key role as a foundation for philosophical and other social sciences work. In fact, this is the ground on which the scientific stimulus of “Science studies” is based on.

Trends in Global Challenges and Socio-Economic Effects

Globally, terrorism has been one of the world’s disasters to many nations with the superpower countries trying to intervene but seems losing the battle. This challenge is traced in the 1st century AD in Judea Province of the Roman Rule. Since then, terrorism is mostly attributed to the power in military and financial abilities, where the superpowers become the benefactors and the targets at the same time. Terrorism has been propelled by undercover power operative organs protected by unpenetrable systems of various depth and dimensions. Terrorism activities affect the economy, the social welfare, cultures and the overall individual lives.

The widespread damages of this phenomenon can be traced in the piles of documentations in the UN custody (United Nations, 2017). The world unquantifiable magnitudes of destruction cause ripple effects through loss of lives destruction of property worth trillions in US dollars. Therefore,

the results include distrust, hatred, Islamophobia and Islamophilia that cost international relations, disharmony in religious fraternity, disintegration of state unity, community cohesion and social classes (Ross, 2019). To significant extent, terrorism has increased with technological innovations (United Nations, 2017).

Another angle of global challenge whose effects live today was the Second World War (WWII). While WWII is a number of decades old, it seems to be beginning of the major transformative calamities that affected the 20th century and now the 21st century societies. Through a period of six years of battles with 30 countries involved, the war left close to 70 million people dead (4% of the world), 39 million in Europe alone. Apart from lives, a significantly large capital was lost and/or messed up where people were forced to change locations without compensation (Kesternich et al., 2014). The war was accompanied by consequential culmination of disasters especially hunger that thrived through the affected families. Family splits and separations, psychological sufferings and misfortune of socio-economic and political altercations were witnessed. The brutal deaths from the nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been accompanied by continuous suffering from burns, cancer and radiation illnesses. While the U.S. was on the intention to show supremacy, the daring Japan wouldn't easily abandon its emperor until 1945 when it surrendered (Amedeo, 2020). This became the absolute that the U.S. gained the superpower status. From then, the U.S. has been in support and leader in both financing and directly taking up challenges from other nations across the world. Will this tradition persist in the post-COVID-19?

At least to some extent, terrorism and WWII can be described as human causes of global challenges. These aside, what "looks" like natural calamities have been baffling the world. In the early 1957, the emergence of the Asian Flu pandemic which started in China left at least a million people dead. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented that the pandemic was experienced in a period of only two years but with a large impact on livelihood. The disease spread through with Singapore (February 1957) then to Hong Kong (April 1957) and by the summer of 1957, it was in the US where about 116,000 lives were lost. This left families separated, orphanage increased, lost human capital and thus massive losses to livelihood.

Later on in 1981, another pandemic that still bites the globe was registered; HIV/AIDs. To present, the pandemic has claimed at least 35 million lives (WHO, 2019). While the emergence of the disease is thought to have risen from chimpanzee virus in the 1920s in West Africa, by late 20th century, it was declared a pandemic. Today, the largest population living with the disease is in sub-Saharan Africa where an estimated 40 million (64%) people are battling the disease. The world has tripled orphanage and split families that are attributed to the disease. Manpower where youths dominate has significantly been wiped, diversion of billions of development funds spent towards its eradication, limiting sexual relations, created mixed religious views and thus controlling social classes at large.

Almost a decade in the 21st century, in 2009, another pandemic struck from Mexico. This time round it was H1N1 swine flu. Within a period of one calendar year (spring 2009 to spring 2010) at least 1.4 billion people were infected with the swine flu virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) records show that within this period, between 151,700 and 575,400 people had died from the pandemic (Hickok, 2020). The effects of H1N1 were not any unique. Loss of lives, registered orphanage, increased poverty due to higher expenditures and pressure on economies of affected countries were evident.

In late 2013, a once known novel Ebola knocked the global doors from West Africa. Ebola had first been reported in 1976 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. It is thought that the disease originated from bats. On its re-emergence, Ebola was first reported in Guinea in December 2013. The disease spread rapidly in to Sierra Leone and Liberia. For a period of 3 years (2014 - 2016) about 28,600 cases of infections had been reported with at least 11,325 deaths. While majority of the deaths occurred within these three countries, others including U.S., parts of Europe, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali were affected (CDC report 2016).

Apparently, before the successful contain of Ebola, Zika Virus epidemic was reported in 2015. To present, the world is battling Zika virus which is known to spread through mosquitoes. Scientists also opine that the virus is sexually transmittable in humans. While the virus neither directly attacks adults nor children, it affects the unborn babies which risk their lives. The Zika virus carrier mosquitoes thrive in warm and humid climates which makes Central America, South America and parts of the southern United States favorable to the virus. Despite the slow and passive effects of the virus, it is feared that the health experts are yet to find any sustainable solution to Zika Virus.

In late 2019, the world registered yet another novel disease first reported in China. From the trends of pandemics and global challenges, what appropriate mitigating approach did the world have towards COVID-19? Did the supremacy positions of nations and social classes of individuals dictate the infections and spread novel COVID-19? Apparently, this will go into records deepest as of today. While the earlier pandemics affect parts or in parts of the world, COVID-19 has hit the entire globe bringing all social gatherings and production activities to halt. Hickok (2020) wonders whether the superpower countries like the U.S. were prepared for such pandemic and large magnitude calamities. With no doubt, the entire world was caught unaware and it is evident from the different response approaches that they did employ.

To date, two unanswered questions across the globe exist - the COVI-19 outbreak cause and the vaccine/treatment. Vaccine may not apply as the medical recommendations and utilization of vaccines is known to take long periods starting with small samples, and growing it continuously. The projections and hearsay about found vaccine may be termed as a tool for emotional and political cooling.

Several but unsupported conspiracy theories on the breakout of COVID-19 are under discussion. In a CNN report by Robert Kuznia and Drew Griffin (April 6, 2020), there is a split in thoughts about the emergence of COVID-19 between the lab leak and animal virus transfer. Others have the opinion that it was a bioweapon which was produced in China while others also propagate that it was taken to Wuhan by the US army. Regardless of the source and its reliability, the inevitable concern is on the effect of the virus. The ban of international travels, lockdown in countries, cessation in some, and the general limit of human movement has a wider perspective of social, psychological, moral, economic, political, environmental, and cultural effects. Indeed the unimaginable socio-economic, psycho-cultural, moral, political and environmental implications flushed out by the unprecedented COVID-19 catastrophe is hereby in timid and helplessly blanketing the entire globe. Further, the unequalled aftermath of the pandemic will be noticed for a period of time with slim expectations of near future recovery.

Socialization Shifts and Implications

In reference to international relations and diplomacy, one of the shifts in order of the social classes and states is after the 2001 bombings in New York and Washington. New transformations have

emerged while old ones reviewed (Kakihara, 2003). The new world order to fight terrorism was driven by the US. This has seen significant international relationship changes between the US and other countries including the EU, China, Russia and the Muslim world. The genesis was during the cold war era where the world order was bipolar – US and USSR taking the lead. By the end of the cold war, the transformation had put away the USSR leaving the US as superpower but with multipolar aspects. Post 9/11 attacks saw the US step up to attain full superpower status with majority of the other nations cooperating to its control of the globe. Kakihara opines that with China's trends in growth, it might reach a clash point with the US. In his postulations, he concludes that while the US may remain on lead command for some time, there is need to plan for contingencies (p.14).

The economic effects of disasters, wars and terrorism range from eroding of the savings of the state to diverting of development finances. The most and immediate effects are death and destruction of property with emotional and psychological effects such as fear and stress being long term. Shift implications in religion as result of terrorism have been debated for a long time (Mapolisa, 2013). The western powers and the secularists charged the Islamic nations, Islamic extremism and hardliners as precursors to the menace. In contrast, the Muslim accused these powers for propelling the spread of terrorism (in the Third World) to activate their weaponry factories functions and create a boost to its market. Henne (2019) appreciates that scholars have shown no evidence of religious terrorism. While different authors have different approaches, only political and nationalism and other arrays in peace development are associated with terrorism. However, the United States has been uncomfortable to welcome and host people coming from Muslim countries. In 2017, the US president Trump through an Executive Order 13769 banned “visitors” from the Muslim countries (BBC News, 2018). This has implications on international relations, unity of vision and socialization. This act has heightened hatred blossom by Muslims against USA.

The post-COVID-19 changes may impact the restructuring of the countries as well. In a Forbes online magazine post (Mar 23, 2020, 12:57pm EDT) by Mark Travers, cultural psychology postulates that the United States may lose its individualistic power after the pandemic. Evidenced by the “protests” of the US on contributions against expenditures at the WHO, researchers interpret it as the need for societal “collectivism” (Travers, 2020). This is supported by the action taken by China to send more finances to WHO when Trump tried to cut the US funding to the body purporting funds expenditure on COVID-19 unaccountability in China. This is also seen in the global collective temporary legalization of social distancing, use of masks, curfew and cessation measures with their immediate penalties on breaches.

On their website, the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre posted “don't wash your hands of human rights obligation”. This message speaks of the likely changes and adjustments by the human rights activists and their classes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the period slogan and campaign has seen the major message contain “wash your hands”. With the rolled out curfews, cessations, and lockdowns, it is evident that many human rights violation incidences will go unnoticed. The domestic violence that is on the rise, the police brutality, escalating corruption strategies, the robbery with violence incidences have none or fewer eyewitnesses. These confines the cases in corners and thus the rights of the victims will go unspoken and doubly followed for compensation or justice. This affects the pre-existing social classes of human for human eye where majority of the poor are represented by human rights activists.

For business community, it has been nightmares and ponders. While a few (medical wear and equipment manufacturers) have reaped big, COVID-19 has forced shut up of businesses, barred the customers from access, and changed the buying priorities and patterns with the most losers being luxury industry. Customers have narrowed down to necessities including food and medical care. The firms that relied on daily productions for survival have since shut down and lay off staffs. The effects of these in economy are yet to explode as economists redraw survival plans. However, as earlier expected, the economic growths of nations started flattening already. Khan and Khan (2020) are of the view that if the death toll of COVID-19 rhymes that of the 2009 “Swine Flu” pandemic (100,000–400,000), the social stratification will significantly be changed with the end of globalization. In this, the scholars suggest that it might accelerate the isolation behavior already seen in the Europe and USA.

In Africa, Evans (2020) analyzed some of the postulations by economy experts such as McKinsey who had estimated the continent’s 2020 growth of 3.9 percent. In the analysis, the expert had considered the worst to be -3.9 percent if such COVID-19 context would emerge. With the current situation, other experts, that is, Breisinger and others put Egypt’s monthly GDP losses around 0.7 to 0.8 percent. For West and Central Africa countries, overreliance on agriculture is also hit following cessations, strict border crossing, market closures and limited movements. Governments have also been forced to cut agricultural expenditures and other institutional budgets to prioritize medical care. Diversions of funds meant for fertilizers, farm inputs and other agricultural essentials have been stopped as a way of focusing on COVID-19 pandemic (Reardon, Bellemare, and Zilberman, 2020). Countries such as Kenya where day labourers no longer vend for their households will cause additional economic scuffle. Al Jazeera News put such laborers at 83.6 per cent of the total workforce in Kenya (Evans, 2020). These scenarios speak loud for sociologists as definite shake up in social stratifications is expected with the majority being lowered from their levels to the immediate lower levels.

What about social aspects of organizations that run and boast of rich corporate culture? According to Berman, and Thurkow (2020), COVID-19 has created an environment of asking organizations whether their adverts on mission, vision and core values are in tandem with their response choices and actions. The service to humanity missions in most of organizations specify on their scope of service confined to welfare of its clients, staff and the entire community. Except for a few like Best Western hotels in the UK and Safaricom in East Africa have tried to keep their businesses afloat with taking up the challenges and turning them into opportunities. Best Western Hotels adjusted their aim of hosting conferences to hosting doctors, nurses, COVID-19 patients and even the isolated. Unlike these, many organizations have sent their employees home, other cut salaries, and other ended their operations following COVID-19. The corporate social responsibility outfit is no longer in the space and this has social implications for future.

COVID-19 has proved to the entire world that cultural changes are indeed inevitable. From the weekly church goers to hourly prayers of the Muslim; from early morning office reporting to those marriage, burial and circumcision rituals, all changed. Janes (2020) analyzes that it is time for many organizations to learn that some boardroom meetings for communication can be done away with – a single email can solve the morning hurries. Teaching and learning have been absorbed by technology; processing of orders, payments have been moved to online platforms; sharing on information, entertainments, social activities including bullying, and all went a notch higher due to COVID-19. Technology has interceded in the pandemic crises which may inform new ways of

working and socialization. This forms a basis of emergence of new socialization aspects, groupings, classes, cultures and even impact.

Just like the rest of the countries battling COVID-19, in Kenya, church and mosque gatherings have been banned by the government, a scenario that has never been witnessed in the country's history. The Muslim Scholars of Kenya (MSK) declared changes in how they handled the dead. A Nakuru SUPKEM secretary besieged the Muslim community to abandon the ritual washing procedures (Ghusl) of corona victims as a way of reducing further infections and spread. Moreover, the usual Mosque prayers during the month of Ramadhan have been changed to take place at private residential homes while the madrassas and Quran schools were closed down. The usual Christian night vigil known as Keshas, outreach programmes like crusades and Sunday services have been put on hold. The Bukusu community of Western Kenya (Bungoma County) agreed and declared the postponement of the cultural circumcision rituals carried out every even year. The cultural community gatherings and sharing of meals on same plate by communities like the Somalis; community marriages, burial ceremonies of Luos, Luhyas and the Mijikendas have been changed. These describe the indispensable social re-stratification taking place in society.

Conclusion

The development following a contingency of global crises and pandemics informs the society of the expectations to change. Even as the global population increases by millions annually, the frequencies of the disasters seem to catch up with humanity as resources shrink. While the critics of Kuhn's paradigm shift theory find no evidence in the postulations, revolutions of pandemics are certainly not over. The changes taking place from the "normal life" are characterized by both natural and man-made calamities which, apparently, in way or another, solutions – temporal or permanent are found. While World Wars and some pandemics like H1N1 are described as history, others like terrorism and HIV/AIDs still live within the global surroundings. The resolution is to prepare to count more and more calamities accompanied by both technological and social stratification changes. The world arrangements of powers of countries are permissible to changes irrespective of the level of technological development, financial capabilities, political muscle nor historical manifestations. The religious inclinations and other cultural practices are subject to division, to change and even evasion in the long run. While globalization was seen as solution to global challenges, it is important to note that individualism has its position in society and thus possible changes in social classes. Whatsoever the repercussions, it is evident that the world is experiencing unprecedented disintegration and economic recession. The future of the entire globe may be leaning on brink of a precipice unless the knowledge on disaster management is elevated to the level of generic significance. This call for enhanced vigilance and provision of skills and policies for disaster preparedness which is looks slim, null and naught as evidenced by the current COVID-19.

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