

The coronavirus crisis affects us all

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| OURECONOMY: OPINION

Can the coronavirus save the planet?

The corona crisis signifies a civilization that is dying. But it also shows a 'pluriverse' of other worlds rising up.

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26 March 2020

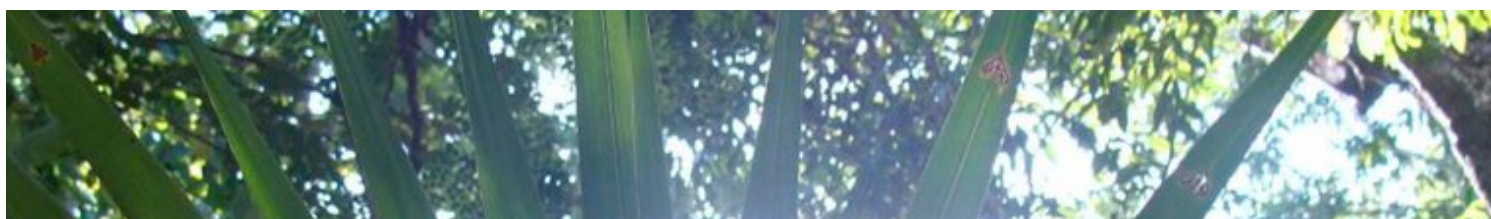




Image: Jonathan.vail, CC by 2.0

C OVID-19 is taking a toll on all of us, especially those least able to retreat into their homes until the worst is over.

But, beyond the health and humanitarian measures urgently needed for those affected, it also offers a chance to right historical wrongs – the abuse of our earthly home and of marginalised societies, the very people who will suffer most from this pandemic. This viral outbreak is a sign that by going too far in exploiting the rest of nature, the dominant globalising culture has undone the planet's capacity to sustain life and livelihoods. The unleashing of micro-organisms from their animal hosts means that they must latch on to other bodies for their own survival. Humans are a part of nature – and everything is connected to everything else.

The current pandemic is just one aspect of the human-made planetary crisis known as the Anthropocene; runaway climate change and biodiversity loss are others – and all are connected. COVID-19 confronts us with a civilizational crisis so immediate and so severe, that the only real strategy will be one that can reach into and heal the web of life.

The Nigerian philosopher Bayo Akomolafe comments that the complexity of our human situation today almost defies thinkability and framing. This crisis strips away all delusional confidence in modern world notions of history, progress, humanity, knowledge, time, secularism, and our tendency to take life itself for granted. It should also caution us against responses that strip away democratic and human rights, as is happening in the name of controlling the virus in many countries, for such responses only further reduce the ability of citizens to deal with such crises.

The corona crisis signifies a civilization that is dying, but also, it shows a pluriverse of 'other worlds' rising up. Every crisis is an opportunity. The key question is how to remake our economy and polity in a way that respects ecological limits and works for all humanity. The answer must go beyond superficial managerial and technological fixes to deep systemic transformations that can shake up structural injustices, unsustainability, and de-futuring. We need a dramatic shift towards genuine democracy; one that places confidence in the time-tested genius of local communities and collectives.

We challenge the old eurocentric mode of existence based on separation of humans from other natural entities – us versus them, mind versus body, secular versus spiritual. By denying the essential interdependence of everything on Earth, this dualist way of thinking and being simply served to entrench the domination of masculine power over life-affirming feminine care. It paved the way for the most objectifying and harmful economy humanity has ever seen, today enshrined in a heavily militarised global neoliberal capitalist (dis)order.

The pandemic is bringing home new lessons. Economic globalization has not brought universal prosperity but ecological devastation, social disruption and inequality. So now, on every continent, we see thinkers and activists setting out to replace the capitalist regime with re-communalization, striving for self-

reliance, even welcoming refugees and others in need, as has happened in Greece in some cases. Against terms dictated by the WTO and multinational corporations, this move to human scale production lets people design their own livelihoods in ways that protect habitat.

Relocalisation may even reverse the desperate flow of rural migration to cities, where population density spreads diseases like Corona so easily. Is this only a pipe-dream? No. Looking around the world, we see thousands of culturally diverse initiatives for food, energy, water, and other forms of community sovereignty. Such localised solutions give back meaning, identity, dignity, and sufficiency to people who have been alienated by a century of so-called progress, under corporate and state centralized power.

The grassroots revolution marks a shift from the precarious economy of derivatives and share markets, into a real economy of making needed goods, giving and sharing 'services'. It speaks a vision of autonomous bio-cultural regions, defined by tangible social and ecological relationships, and making tangible the argument that mutual aid and local ecosystem protection are more effective for dealing with crises and even pandemics than centralized statist measures. As against neoliberal privatisation, here land and water, ideas and knowledge, are honoured as commons. This future implies degrowth, a respect for limits, a reduction and fair redistribution of materials and energy on the planet.

Across the globe today there is a re-birth of radical democracy, often led by women or by youth, whose energies 'for life' combine with social movements for the liberation of species, genders, castes, and oppressed class groupings. Our book Pluriverse: A Post-development Dictionary collects together a multitude of such transformative alternatives. There are indigenous re-assertions of harmony with the Earth in buen vivir and ubuntu; new notions emerging from broken industrial contexts like ecofeminism and degrowth; practical networks for agroecology and free software; and dozens of others.

The book draws a sharp contrast between such deep structural shifts and 'reformist solutions' that assume One Globalized World pre-coded by Western values, and mobilised by the futile logic of growth. What emerges is a living language for the wealth and diversity of people's knowledges and practices attuned to planetary wellbeing. This lexicon is building a Global Tapestry of Alternatives; it offers a collaborative space for activists weaving together transformative initiatives across the world; it becomes a new horizon for being and doing.

The Corona pandemic ends a universe of false promises. The pluriverse announces new hope for radical democracy that includes all of life – 'a world where many worlds fit'.

Libya: between conflict and pandemic, what hope for human rights?

In Libya, despite a collapsed health system, conflict has intensified. People are trapped between fighting and the threat of the coronavirus.

How can countries in conflict tackle the spread of the coronavirus? How far should their people give up personal freedoms and human rights? And what can international law do?

Join Lawyers for Justice in Libya and openDemocracy to discuss Libya's dilemmas on 21 May at 1pm BST/2pm CET.

Speakers

Asma Khalifa Libyan activist and researcher and co-founder of the Tamazight Women's Movement. She is currently a research fellow at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies. In 2017, Asma was named

one of the '100 Most Influential Young Africans'.

Tarek Megerisi Libyan political analyst and researcher, currently a Policy Fellow of the North Africa and Middle East programme at the European Council of Foreign Relations in London.

Hanan Salah Senior Libya researcher in the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch.

Kate Vigneswaran Senior Legal Adviser with the MENA Programme of the International Commission of Jurists. Prior to joining the ICJ, she was a consultant with the UNDOC's Eastern Africa and Southeast Asia regional offices, Legal Director of Fortify Rights in Southeast Asia, and prosecution lawyer at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Chair: Marwa Mohamed Head of Advocacy and Outreach at Lawyers for Justice in Libya. Prior to joining LFJL, she worked as the Libya Researcher with Amnesty International, documenting human rights violations in Libya.

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Nicholas=VictoryofthePeople • 2 months ago • edited

By that 'unleashing of micro-organisms from their animal hosts', were the authors referring to the infamous bat-eating incident, which went viral on global social media? Or are they referring to the activities of the Wuhan scientists who have been collecting and storing pathogens deadly to humans from bats for at least 8 years?

The new 'Bio-safety' laboratory opened in Wuhan in 2017. This 'Nature' report celebrates Chinese progress in the field, but also warns of the risks of pathogens escaping and the laboratory's 'dual function' of advancing our understanding and serving military uses

<https://www.nature.com/news...>

This scientific paper in Nature, from 2013, details the successful collection and identification of corona-type viruses from Chinese Horseshoe bats by the Wuhan team. 'Success' means finding viruses that easily transmit to humans. The publishing date suggests such work has been ongoing for 8 years at the very least.

<https://www.nature.com/arti...>

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Ashish Kothari → **Nicholas=VictoryofthePeople** • 2 months ago

thanks for this comment. Our phrase there was intended to refer to a number of such incidences, not only COVID-19. How this happens differs in each case, some in the possible ways you've mentioned in your comment, others from eating wild meats, and possibly several others we may not even understand yet. the basic point is about the massive interference with nature that human activity has involved.

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share >


James Morgan • 2 months ago

Total bollocks. Civilisation dying? Utter bollocks.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share >



Ashish Kothari → James Morgan • 2 months ago

Obviously you have not read this carefully. We did not say 'civilisation is dying'. We said 'a civilisation is dying'. Big difference. We also said other worlds are rising. The hyperindustrial modernism (note, different from 'modern') project of a certain 'western' model of civilisation, in its current worst form of masculinist capitalism or statism, has caused planetary mayhem, but there are many other worldviews and ways of being/doing that can rescue us. that's the main message of this article. If you want to engage, do so with reasoned arguments, not with simple curses.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Leviathan • 2 months ago • edited

On the contrary, I believe that the current curbs on freedom placed upon people will demonstrate how much more preferable capitalism is than the alternative. I believe it will ensure that the causes of 'degrowth' and socialism are retarded by at least a couple of generations. Anyone living through these restrictions will not want them repeated during their lifetime.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Ashish Kothari → Leviathan • 2 months ago

Clearly, you have not understood 'degrowth' in all its sophistication. And we do not advocate 'socialism', not sure where you got that from. Community sovereignty is way higher a form of freedom than anything capitalism can provide, both because it is freedom from the stranglehold of both mega corporations and the state, and also because what is 'freedom' for some in a capitalist (or statist) system is bondage for others who suffer the grave consequences of ecological devastation and labour exploitation. In contrast, thousands of initiatives around the world show how it is possible for people to live in control over their own economic, political, socio-cultural lives, while respecting others and respecting the rest of nature. If we don't learn these lessons from the current crisis, we are blind ... blinded by human arrogance and the greed and power of those few who control our destinies.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Leviathan → Ashish Kothari • 2 months ago

Yes of course we're blind! Man is s competitive animal driven mostly by greed, powered by violence. Greed for all sorts of things, violence of all kinds.

You & I may wish that this were not so but it fundamentally underpins human psychology. To wish otherwise is Utopian.

All one can ever hope to do is mitigate the effects; the drivers are permanent.

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Glenn Albrecht · 2 months ago

An astute contribution to the discussion of Covid-19. The idea of the Symbiocene in my book *Earth Emotions* might add to the mix as well. Busting symbiotic connections in the Anthropocene has its hugely negative consequences ... Covid-19 is but one of them. Repairing the dysbiosis of the Anthropocene will be a major task undertaken by Generation Symbiocene.

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Ashish Kothari → [Glenn Albrecht](#) · 2 months ago

Interesting concept, Symbiocene ... would you be willing to write for our website www.radicalecologicaldemocr... on this? Do write to me at ashishkothari@riseup.net, if you are interested. thanks for the comment.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Swati Prakash · 2 months ago · edited

There are countless dangers involving animal exploitation by humans which is purely out of greed and propensity to evil. If we do not care for lives and freedoms of other species what right do we have to respect our own? I believe when we abolish animal farming and exploitation we will begin to heal the world else it's all an illusion. There is too much land, water, food shortage and deforestation due to animal agriculture and over two million humans die each year due to infections alone because of animal exploitation industries and many more due to heart diseases, cancers and diabetes due to animal products used for food. But over 70 billion land animals killed each year for food alone, not counting other violent industries, and trillions of sea animals each year killed painfully is simply shameful. Thank you for highlighting that we are responsible for our actions to other species on earth. Sadly all people do is get violent and angry against vegan ideology as if they have zero moral or health quotient and as if they are defending their ideology instead of understanding that we are all interconnected in our soul with all species and hurting or harming others is going to rebound on us. But lack of interest in our own inner awareness or conscious awakening is not going to help in saving our planet or even our own souls.

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Ashish Kothari → [Swati Prakash](#) · 2 months ago

thanks, swati, well said. But I think moralising, whether from those defending their consumerist lifestyles that encourage industrial scale agriculture and livestock production, or (to be frank) from some vegans, does not help. Pointing to the ills of such consumerism (and this would also be true of those who support, knowingly or otherwise, Green Revolution kind of crop production, and enabling lifestyle changes based on this and offering accessible alternatives, would be the way to go.

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Swati Prakash → [Ashish Kothari](#) · 2 months ago

Thank you I have heard that before but I feel we should not have to worry so much for defending innocents. People start comparing hoisting dairy spent cows upside down and slitting their throats live or grinding newborn baby chicks alive by the millions in machines to insects killed during non-veganic plant agriculture or gardening. No we do not need to be ashamed of being morally awakened..we are responsible for our karma but sadly people start comparison with vegans as if vegans are a different race. We are all human animals and we are all guilty of destroying our planet and killing sentient innocents by trillions ..most of them babies and it's not about food system change..it's about very basic morals that are ignored because we are brainwashed by society to be okay with others for the sake of pleasing them. After watching Dominion, Earthlings, and Land of Hope and Glory free documentaries on YouTube still arguing about how veganic agriculture of oranges and lemons is just the same thing would be very very unlikely unless we be demons.

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Ashish Kothari → [Swati Prakash](#) · a month ago

Industrial scale agriculture, whether for crops or animals, leads to the destruction of natural ecosystems like rainforests, wetlands, etc, which are habitats for countless wild animals and plants. the suffering of animals as a result is not as visible as battery hens and slaughter houses, but it is no less. So I think we need to challenge consumption patterns of various kinds, especially those of us who as elites buy or consume products from all over the planet, with no consideration for their consequences. Even this technology we use is dependent on mining in central Africa, where forests are destroyed (and local communities displaced). this is in no way to justify the cruelty of slaughterhouses etc ... I began my work on environment as an animal rights activist, and remain committed to those ethics. But I am also astounded by how such activists are often not aware of, or unwilling to accept, the consequences (including for animals) of our consumption patterns even as vegetarians or vegans. I can send you a presentation I made to the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO), on these aspects, if you like ... send me an email at ashishkothari@riseup.net.

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Swati Prakash → [Ashish Kothari](#) · a month ago



Absolutely right...we have to make system change a priority too... because any kind of deforestation for mining, housing, factory or anything is wrong. However killing of a sentient being either by yown hands or paying for it is the same..it's violence. To not kill intentionay us just a very simple choice we all humans can make at a personal level right now instead of waiting aeons for the golden age through system change. We can all join forces for system change starting with ourself.

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terencegalland • 12 days ago

09/05/2020

pity it never came during last quarter of 20th century were not a natural species are we were a mistake a blight

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