

Correspondence

To return or not to return: on post-Anthropocene and the pandemic

ABSTRACT

Some studies indirectly link the pandemic to the Anthropocene. However, this brief essay identifies the Anthropocene as a Western-bred phenomenon, which has evolved from Europe's colonial past. Pandemics are not new to settler colonialism, for instance. In this broader framework, the Covid-19 pandemic comes at a time when the West is confronting a new challenge to its global influence, i.e. the climate emergency resulting from a long history of colonial experiments, successes and failures.

Keywords Anthropocene, climate change, colonialism, pandemic, second Copernican revolution

In the early months of the pandemic, Bruno Latour described the Covid-19 as a 'dress rehearsal' to the most defining battle of humanity ahead—climate change.¹ Apropos of the scientific rush to develop a vaccine, meanwhile, 2020 seemed to recall the 'ground-zero empiricism' of 17th century science, battling the Bubonic plague. Like being thrown back into that time capsule, the pre-Covid-19 vaccine period brings to mind the past struggles of science facing an unknown.²

But with several Western countries re-normalizing due to aggressive vaccine roll-out, the Western world, as it were, is finally returning to the 21st century. The rest awaits their turn, with their governments overwhelmed by logistics.

In a global community characterized by closeness defined by the modern age border-breaking technologies but prone to a domino effect of planetary collapse,³ the pandemic brings unprecedented challenges. However, Western societies are secured by the standard coefficients of their emergency rule-book: massive economic infrastructures, cutting-edge R&D and an expansive geopolitical influence, not to mention a long experience of colonial history. (The only non-Western country with tremendous resilient capacity amid the pandemic, matching those Western coefficients, is China, where Covid-19 originated).

In this broader framework, I argue that the Anthropocene is a Western-bred phenomenon, going back to centuries of colonial experiments, successes and failures.⁴ Globalization, the outcome of this problematic rectification curve, has

sealed this planetary reality, not without its often recurring crises.

As early as 2000, the CIA, for instance, predicted that in 20 years, humanity would be forced to (i) call a stalemate with 'microbes' producing infectious diseases or (ii) embrace a defeatist outlook in the face of lethal pathogens due to 'overcrowding, poor sanitation, and unprotected drinking water'.⁵ But the CIA could only have in mind most of the non-Western world, with regards to the social cost of 'ground-zero empiricism' peculiar to developing countries catching up with scientific and economic progress.

This report reveals, among others, the pathogenic context of the Anthropocene centered on planetary health management, using a cybernetics-based Earth model, ushering in the second Copernican revolution.⁶ A geo-cybernetic revolution, another Western-type cosmotechnics,⁷ promises to avert if not lessen the impact of an extinction-threatening anthropogenic climate change striking at the heart of planetary existence—the health of all living systems.

But can a second Copernican revolution forestall a climate collapse? Can the Anthropocene sustain healthy post-Anthropocene humanity? Could this finally bring the West to relinquish its planetary dominance? And to which new global stakeholder? Would a metonymic shift⁸ to a different conception of nature facilitate this new world order? Would all of humanity be allowed to return to the present?

Incidentally, with the West, predominantly represented by the USA, heir to Europe's colonial past, and China as new space age rivals, space colony provides a clue to the post-Anthropocene future, away from the climate and infection bubble surrounding the blue planet. Arguably, a third Copernican revolution will redefine health, echoing David Bowie's fabled Major Tom's predicament.⁹ To return or not to return to Earth. To health. To humanity.

References

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